SOCIAL CHANGE

Fourth Edition

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Preface

The fourth edition of this book is a response to the increasing demands for timely and comprehensive sociological analysis of one of the most important concerns of our time, social change. It offers increased emphasis on multicultural and international issues, retains the classroom-tested, pedagogically sound features and organizational framework of the previous editions, and remains scholarly, comprehensive, informative, at times controversial, and quite readable.

The objective of the book is to provide a clear, concise, and up-to-date analysis of the principal theoretical perspectives, sources, processes, patterns, and consequences of social change. It considers factors that stimulate or hinder the acceptance of change in a cross-cultural context, and it emphasizes unintended consequences and costs of both planned and unplanned change. It dwells on the ways of creating and on the methods of assessing change. Going beyond standard treatments of the topic, this text highlights those aspects of theory and research that have immediate practical implications for students of social change. Although the orientation of the book is sociological, I did not hesitate to incorporate theoretical and current empirical work from anthropology, social psychology, economics, political science, and history.

This edition reflects the many comments and recommendations made by students and colleagues who have used the book in their classrooms and research. Whereas the basic plan of the text remains unchanged, there is much that is new. Almost every page of this edition has been revised, not only for the purpose of updating, but also to increase its informative function, advance its analysis, and minimize lapses into dry academic prose. New sections have been added, and dated parts were dropped. Key concepts and ideas have been developed in virtually every chapter. Most chapters have been reconsidered and enlarged or reduced when warranted, and all have been updated to reflect the latest theoretical and empirical advances and the most recent statistics, but not at the expense of the rich classical literature that provides the intellectual foundation of this book. Thus the reader will have a chance to learn what is new while being exposed to traditional sociological thinking. The novel features include discussions on current developments in the former Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact nations, global-

ization, trends in higher education, the social impact of the proliferation of personal computers, and the steadily increasing economic and social costs of environmental changes. A unique aspect of the book is its extensive use of cross-cultural illustrations.

Although any errors, inaccuracies, omissions, and commissions are accepted—and regretted—as my own responsibility, much of the book derives from many persons, mostly colleagues and students, whose help and cumulative wisdom I gratefully acknowledge. Special thanks go to my students in courses on social change over the past thirty years who patiently endured many earlier drafts of the various revisions and offered many valuable suggestions. As with other books and scholarly endeavors, the Vago Foundation once again made this project feasible and went beyond expectations in providing financial, research, and secretarial assistance; encouragement; and the requisite infrastructure for the preparation of this text.

At Prentice Hall, I extend my gratitude to Sharon Chambliss, Nancy Roberts, Kathryn Beck, and Kim Gueterman for their outstanding processing of the manuscript and to Aristide Sechandice for expertly preparing the index.

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Contents

Chapter **1**

Introduction: Dimensions and Sources of Change

At the onset of the second millennium, change continues to be all-pervasive, ubiquitous, and at times disconcerting. People from all walks of life talk about it, want it, oppose it, fear it, and at times they even want to make sense out of it. But there is nothing new in the allure of change. From the beginning, social change has been an integral part of the human condition. Since the earliest times, there has been a fascination with change, a constant preoccupation with its ramifications, and prolonged agitation about its consequences. This book is about that age-old concern with social change, which is, with all due modesty, one of the most important, challenging, and exciting topics in sociology.

The science of sociology began in the quest for explanations for social change. The advent of this new science marked the beginning of a long and sinuous road toward making "sense" of change. Yet, in spite of the multitude of efforts since its inception, the discipline of sociology is still confronted with the questions of how society changes, in what direction, why, in what specific ways, and by what forces these changes are created. Considering the fact that social change has been ubiquitous and, from time to time, a dramatic feature of society, there is still a great deal to learn about its nature and scope. Today social change is a central concern of sociology, and it is likely to remain one of the most intriguing and difficult problems in the discipline.

The intention of this book is to draw attention to the complexities and concerns inherent in the understanding of social change. It will concentrate on the more salient features, characteristics, processes, and perspectives of change in the United States and cross-culturally. The purpose is to try to make "sense" of change and to consider what is changing—and where, why, and how.

The principal mission of the book is to serve as a text in undergraduate courses on social change. The comprehensiveness and the large number of references included also make the book a valuable resource for both graduate students interested in social change and instructors who may be teaching a course on the subject for the first time. Because the book has been written with the undergraduate student in mind, no one particular perspective or approach to change has been taken, nor has a specific ideology or theoretical perspective been embraced. To have done so would have been too limiting for the scope of this book, since important contributions to social change would have had to have been excluded or would have been subject to criticism that such contributions were out of context. As a result, the book does not propound a single thesis; instead, it exposes the reader to a variety of theoretical perspectives proposed to account for social change in the social science literature.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The book deals with modes of social inquiry of change. It examines the principal theoretical, empirical, analytical, and evaluative aspects in the study of social change. The discussion of the various topics combines sociological classics with significant contemporary insights and balances the presentation of theory with useful and testable hypotheses. When warranted, theoretical insights are translated into practical applications in a variety of situations. To make the text more comprehensive and interesting, the sociological perspectives are supplemented with viewpoints drawn from other disciplines in the social sciences and an abundance of cross-cultural and historical illustrations. The following comments on chapter contents will provide a schematic orientation for the reader.

This chapter examines the nature and the basic concepts of the subject matter and presents an approach for the conceptualization of social change. Next, the sources of change are considered. They encompass the impetus for change, the driving force behind change, and the conditions that are sufficient to produce it. The principal sources of change chosen for analysis are technology, ideology, competition, conflict, political and economic forces, and structural strains.

Sociological explanations of *why* social change occurs are as old as the discipline itself. To introduce the reader to the diverse theoretical orientations, Chapter 2 reviews the most influential and important classical and contemporary *theories* of social change. They are discussed by principal perspectives and proponents. The review concentrates on evolutionary, conflict, structural-functional, and social-psychological explanations of social change.

After the identification and analysis of forces that produce change, we need to consider the question of how and in what form change takes place. In Chapter 3 the discussion focuses on such *patterns* of change as evolution, diffusion, acculturation, revolution, modernization, industrialization, urbanization, and bureaucratization.

One might comment at this stage of the discourse: "So far, so good, but what has really changed in our contemporary world?" In response to this question, Chapter 4 examines trends in such specific social arrangements and *spheres* as family, population, stratification, power relations, education, and economy.

Once a change is accepted at any level of the social system, it is appropriate to ask how long it is likely to be sustained. Thus, the question of *duration* becomes important; this is discussed in Chapter 5 in terms of both the long-term and transitory phenomena of change such as fads, fashions, lifestyles, and cults.

Social change contains varying dialectical modes. It is neither automatic nor unopposed. It affects individuals and groups in society in different ways, for whom change may mean different things. Chapter 6, on the *reactions* to change, looks at the social, psychological, cultural, and economic forces and conditions that facilitate or hinder the acceptance of change.

The question of what new social arrangements must be made, once change is brought about, has seldom been considered adequately in the literature on social change. The purpose of Chapter 7 is to examine the *impacts* and effects of change, its unintended consequences, and the methods of coping with change.

Any alteration of the social system and all forms of social engineering carry a price tag. But the price we pay for it is rarely mentioned. In Chapter 8, the discussion is concerned with the issues of the economics of change and the social and psychological *costs* of "progress."

How to bring about social change is among the most crucial and timely questions in the book. Thus, an analysis of strategies to create "desired" change is paramount. The aim of Chapter 9 is to analyze a series of social change *strategies* and tactics used in a variety of change efforts.

The last chapter is devoted to the current methodologies used in the *assessment* of the viability of change on social arrangements. Emphasis is placed on technology and environment assessment, techniques of change evaluation, and methodologies for forecasting change, with applicable policy implications.

The study of social change is naturally eclectic. Knowledge about it has accumulated in shreds and patches. In attempting to explain social change—whether on the scale of major transformations in society or of a more specialized, localized kind—one is tempted to look for "prime movers" analogous to the forces of Newtonian physics. But there are no "laws" in sociol-

ogy comparable to the laws of physics. At best, we have some good general-izations. Our investigations are guided by a number of theoretical perspec-tives, resulting in a variety of strands of thought and research. In pulling them together, we will be guided by the following concerns:

1. What do we need to know about social change? What are the principal issues in the study of change?
2. What do we really know? What are the major theories and findings in the field? How much confidence can we have in them?
3. What remains to be known? What are the major gaps, "unknowns," or *lacunae*, in theory and research?

In a sense, more problems are raised than can be solved in this volume. One of the fascinating aspects of the study of social change is that there are so many loose ends, so many ways of considering the subject, and so much yet to be learned. It is hoped that this book will serve as a useful point of departure for further study of change.

THE NATURE OF SOCIAL CHANGE

One of the central issues of our time is change. The Greek philosopher Hera-clitus stated this in his oft-quoted proposition that one cannot step twice in the same river. The same observation in the words of a modern author: "The action in its repetition can never be the same. Everything involved in it has irrevocably changed in the intervening period" (Adam, 1990:168).

Everywhere change has become central to people's awareness, and there is a commitment to change that is irreversible, irresistible, and irrev-ocable. In every society, there is technological change, demographic change, rapid ecological change, and change induced by internal incon-gruities in economic and political patterns and by conflicting ideologies. Since the mid-1990s, Americans have had more than 4 million babies and 1.6 million abortions annually. Over 2 million couples wed every year, and a little over 1 million divorce. Life expectancy for Americans has reached a record level, while infant mortality rate has fallen to a new low (Stolberg, 1997). Forty-three million Americans move in a given year, 10 million change occupations, 1.5 million retire, and 2.5 million die. In the work-place, millions are hired, fired, promoted, demoted, and sued. New prod-ucts appear on the market, and old skills become obsolete. New causes, issues, and excuses emerge with their appropriate slogans, politically cor-rect vocabulary, and targets for blame. For our explorations, the funda-mental questions relate to what is changing, at what level, and how fast. Further, we want to know what type of change is taking place—and what its magnitude and scope are.

An obvious first question in considering the nature of social change is "What is changing?" For the layperson, it could be everything or nothing. The question as it is phrased is just too broad, too general to be meaningful. In the United States, the standard form of greeting someone is usually followed by the question, "What's new?" Invariably, we are at a loss to come up with a coherent and cogent response to this habitual but ridiculous question. Still, it is an everyday occurrence. As a rule, we fire back an equally ridiculous and meaningless response: "not much," "nothing," or similar remarks in that vein. To avoid this dilemma of uncomfortable ambiguity, we need to go beyond the original question and specify what it is that is assertedly changing. Change, when it exists, is change of something with a specific identity—whether this be a norm, a relationship, or the divorce rate. Failure to specify the identity of *what* is changing can easily lead to confusion.

Once we have established the identity of what is changing, the next consideration is the *level* at which change takes place. Even though the concept of social change is inclusive of all social phenomena, in reality, we cannot study and comprehend change without knowing where it takes place. Thus, we need to identify the location in the social system in which a particular change is occurring. We can establish several units of study and focus our attention, for example, on the following levels: individuals, groups, organizations, institutions, and society.

Thus, change is becoming "social" and we are also becoming a bit more specific with our question. We might now pose the question, "What is changing and at what *level*?" We are now talking about the scope of change in relation to the number of persons or groups whose norms or social arrangement change; that is, the location of a particular change in a social system as well as the type of norm, attribute, or relationship that has changed. For example, on the *individual* level we can talk about changes in attitudes, beliefs, aspirations, and motivations. On the group level we might consider changes in the types of interaction patterns—in communication, methods of conflict resolution, cohesion, unity, competition, and acceptance and rejection patterns. At the level of *organizations*, the scope of change would include alterations in the structure and function of organizations and changes in hierarchy, communication, role relationship, productivity, recruitment, and socialization patterns. At the *institutional* level, change may include alterations in marriage and family patterns, education, and religious practices. At the level of *society*, change may be seen as the modification of the social stratification, economic, and political systems. In the context of the discussion, the level at which change takes place will be easily discernible to the reader.

Now we are getting closer. We know roughly what is changing and at what level. So we might as well be a bit more specific and raise the question, "How long does it take for a certain type of change to come about?" In other words, we are referring to the *rate* of change. That is, at what rate does a specific change take place? The rate of change can be measured by a specific set

of time intervals such as days, months, years, decades, or centuries; or, it can be designated as slow and rapid. Obviously, rate—that is, time in a comparative sense—enters into the study of social change through the use of words such as long-term or short-term, and will be an important consideration in discussing the duration of change.

The *magnitude* of change is somewhat more difficult to delineate. As an illustration, the three-part scheme proposed by Robert Dahl (1967) for measuring the magnitude of political change—incremental or marginal, comprehensive, and revolutionary—is suggested. Incremental or marginal changes would be those that expand, reduce, or otherwise modify the contours of a particular norm or behavior without altering or repudiating its basic substance or structure. There is consensus in the literature that incremental change is the most common and "normal" pattern of change in the United States. Comprehensive changes might represent the culmination of related incremental changes, or, in Dahl's terms, "sweeping innovations or decisive reversals of established" (1967:264) norms or behavior patterns. Changes of revolutionary magnitude would involve wholesale substitution of one type of norm or behavior for another, and decisive rejection of the original behavior as well.

To round off our contemplations about the nature of change, we need to ask whether a particular change at a particular level is deliberate or unplanned. **Deliberate or *planned* social change refers to inventing or developing social technologies consistent with existing social and behavioral knowledge and adequate to the practical and moral requirements of contemporary change situations**. At the individual level, for example, it might be changing attitudes and behavior toward minorities. On the organizational level, it may entail attempts to increase efficiency and productivity. At the institutional level, the object may be to create more educational opportunities for disadvantaged students. At the level of society, change may entail the replacement of one political and economic system by another, as evidenced by recent large-scale transformations in Eastern Europe. The unplanned consequences of change include the unanticipated and the dysfunctional results of a planned change. For example, the minimum wage law, providing a minimum hourly wage of $5.15 in late 1997, was intended to provide unskilled laborers with an income slightly above the poverty level. Unintentionally, however, this provision has contributed to the increase in teenage unemployment, particularly among black youth, and reduced job prospects for low-wage earners. It has also played a role in the increase in the gender wage gap (Shannon, 1996). When the minimum wage increased in the past, employers tended to hire more part-time than full-time workers and the overall level of hiring was lower (*The Wall Street Journal*, 1987:60).

In sum, when considering social change, it is helpful to specify its identity (what is changing), and to determine its level, rate of change, magnitude, causes, and consequences. With this in mind, let us examine various ways of looking at social change.

CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

There are about as many ways of describing social change as there are ways of studying societies (Chirot, 1986:2). It is a buzz word for politicians, and change is the first thing newly hired administrators talk about. Economists, demographers, anthropologists, political scientists, historians, and sociologists bring their own special disciplines to the diverse conceptualizations of change (see, for example, Lindblom, 1997). Even among sociologists, discussions of social change often begin with complaints about the lack of uniformity concerning the definition of change. The point is well taken, for practically every book on social change has a section on definitions, conditioned by the author's theoretical and ideological orientation, in an attempt to narrow the concept down. There is a multiplicity of such ventures emphasizing different features, and the following sample of definitions will focus on the principal areas of emphasis in the post–Second World War social change literature. The elements that are variously highlighted over time are group activities, structure and functions, and social relationships.

Different Group Activities

In its most concrete sense, social change means that large numbers of people are engaging in group activities and relationships that are different from those in which they or their parents engaged in some time before. As stated by Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills: "By social change we refer to whatever may happen in the course of time to the roles, the institutions, or the orders comprising a social structure, their emergence, growth and decline" (1953:398). Society is a complex network of patterns of relationships in which all the members participate in varying degrees. These relationships change, and behavior changes at the same time. Individuals are faced with new situations to which they must respond. These situations reflect such factors as the introduction of new techniques, new ways of making a living, changes in place of residence, and new innovations, ideas, and social values. Thus, social change means modifications of the way people work, rear a family, educate their children, govern themselves, and seek ultimate meaning in life.

Change in the Structure of Society

Many sociologists view social change as a change in the structure of society or alteration of the social structure such as the structural transformation of small, isolated, and illiterate societies (Riches, 1995). For instance, Morris Ginsberg (1958:205) writes: "By social change I understand a change in the social structure, for example, the size of a society, the composition or

balance of its parts or the type of its organizations. Examples of such changes are the contraction in the size of the family . . . the breaking up of the domainal economy with the rise of the cities, the transition from 'estates' to social classes. . . ." Viewed from a somewhat different perspective, "Social change is the significant alteration of social structures (that is, of patterns of social action and interaction), including consequences and manifestations of such structures embodied in norms (rules of conduct), values and cultural products and symbols" (Moore, 1968:366).

It is understandable why social structure (patterns of social behavior that include statuses, roles, groups, and institutions such as the family, religion, politics, and the economic system) is being emphasized in change. Social structures are not stable, tightly integrated, or harmonious, but are unstable, loosely put together, and torn by dissension. To ignore this profound phenomenon and process is to miss a central fact about societies.

Change in the Structure and Functioning of Society

Others stress that social change is not only a change in the structure, but also in the functioning of society. "Social change comprises modifications in social systems or subsystems in structure, functioning, or process over some period of time" (Allen, 1971:39). Similarly, "By 'social change' is meant only such alterations as occur in social organization—that is, the structure and functions of society" (Davis, 1949:622). Harry M. Johnson (1960:626, 628) goes into some detail in observing that: "Social change is change in the structure of a social system; what has been stable or relatively unchanging changes. Moreover, of structural changes the most important are those that have consequences for the functioning of the system—for attaining its goals more (or less) efficiently or for fulfilling more (or less) efficiently the conditions that must be met if the system is to survive at all." These classic conceptualizations can be illustrated by the large-scale transformation that took place in Taiwan since the 1960s that have accompanied massive economic development, industrialization, and urbanization (Marsh, 1996).

Change in Social Relationships

Some authors consider social change principally in terms of a specific change in social relationships. For example, "By social change is meant changes in social relationships . . . the changing ways in which human beings relate to one another" (MacIver & Page, 1949:511). A generation later, in the same vein, Judson R. Landis (1974:229) writes: "Social change refers to change in the structure and functioning of the social relationships of a society."