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IN CONFLICT AND ORDER UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY

D. STANLEY EITZEN





In Conflict and Order Understanding Society

Third Edition

D. Stanley Eitzen

Colorado State University

Allyn and Bacon, Inc.

Boston • London • Sydney • Toronto

To my parents, David and Amanda



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Preface

This is not a *traditional* textbook for the introductory course in sociology. Several foci separate it from most mainstream books. Foremost, the book examines *social organizations from a critical perspective*. Far from a dispassionate description of the way things are, this book enumerates the positive and negative consequences of social structure. The book will introduce sociology, then, by showing how structure is important and necessary while simultaneously leading to social problems. This view of social life provides an integrated framework that will aid the reader in developing a sociological perspective. The book is designed to provide a coherent, consistent, and critical view of society.

Many introductory students will only be exposed to sociology once. They should leave that course with a new and meaningful way of understanding themselves, others, and society. The most fundamental goal of this book is to assist the student in developing a sociological perspective—all else is secondary.

I have made the following major changes for this third edition.

1. The materials have been updated, using the latest census data.
2. One chapter has been added—"Education in America."
3. Two chapters—socialization and sex roles/sex stratification—have been combined into one—"Sex Roles and Sex Stratification." This act was not meant to minimize these crucial topics but was done in response to the suggestions of many instructors who felt that the original division was artificial.
4. The chapters on stratification, poverty, race, family, and the economy have been reworked substantially.
5. New topics that have been added include: the structural transformation of the economy, the politics of advertising, the public and private invasion of individual privacy, the gay rights movement, the contemporary structural conditions of class consciousness, the feminization of poverty, Reaganomics, the discrimination against native Americans, colonial theory, affirmative action, the segmented labor markets, the mechanisms that reinforce male dominance, capitalist patriarchy, the politics of the mainline churches, the political economy of education, the social class bias of the educational system, the funding of public education, the mechanisms to promote equality of opportunity in education, megamergers, interlocking directorates, the robotization of the workplace, the changing composition of the labor force, deindustrialization, the impact of Political Action Committees, the antinuclear movement, civil disobedience, and the class bias of the framers of the Constitution.
6. New boxed materials have been added to show that people can organize to counteract and change existing social arrangements. These make the point

that while there are strong social forces impinging on individuals, their behaviors are not totally controlled. People are not only the products of society but also its architects.

Although the final responsibility for this book is mine, it reflects the influence, work, and support of many persons. I am indebted to a number of scholars—Marvin Olsen, Peter Berger, William Ryan, Jerome Skolnick, Michael Parenti, Michael Harrington, Barry Bluestone, and Bennett Harrison—whose ideas I have incorporated. I am especially indebted to Maxine Baca Zinn, my co-author on another project, who has had a substantial impact on this new edition. In addition to her constructive criticisms and valuable suggestions, she wrote the chapter on the family and combined and revised the chapters on sex roles and sexism.

Prologue:

From Author to Reader

When I took my first course in sociology in 1953, the approach, typical of that day, emphasized the formal theoretical concepts of the discipline in a manner equivalent to premed courses. The result was that most students were left with the impression that sociology was composed of unrelated concepts, that it made simple events into abstract "principles," and that it had no meaning for their lives. By the time I had taught my first college course in sociology in 1967, a new approach was in ascendancy. In contrast to the tedious, concept-memorizing approach, the new mode was to make sociology relevant at all costs. The topics considered centered on such issues as racism, imperialism, gay rights, pornography, victimless crimes, welfare mothers, and alternative life-styles. While classes using this approach were interesting, the students were frequently left with little else than unrelated facts and titillating anecdotes. These students, as did the students of my day, had a serious failing—the inability to understand the importance of social factors in explaining the behavior of individuals and groups and to apply sociological explanations to new issues as they arise.¹

This book will attempt to provide the student with the best of these two approaches while eliminating their weaknesses. The concepts of sociology are important to understand—but not as representing unrelated social phenomena. Social life coheres, and so should the concepts that identify its structure and processes. Sociology is inherently interesting, fascinating, relevant, and exciting, and any text that does not convey these qualities is misrepresenting and betraying the discipline.

The ultimate objectives of this book are to provide the reader with (1) an intuitive grasp of the sociological perspective; and (2) a consistent framework from which to view, understand, and interpret social life. The first goal, the adoption of the sociological perspective, will be emphasized explicitly in the first chapter and implicitly throughout the book. The sociological perspective focuses on the social sources of behavior. It requires the shedding of existing myths and ideologies by questioning all social arrangements. One of the most persistent questions of the sociologist is: Who benefits from the existing customs and social order and who does not? Since social groups are created by people, they are not sacred. Is there a better way? One editorial writer has posed a number of questions that illustrate the critical approach typical of the sociological perspective:

Must we [Americans] try to perpetuate our global empire, maintaining far-flung military outposts, spending billions on the machinery of death, meddling in the affairs of other nations—or is there a better way? Must we con-

tinue to concentrate power and wealth in the hands of a few, preserving the income gaps that have remained virtually undisturbed through the New Deal, Fair Deal, New Frontier, and Great Society—or is there a better way? Must millions of our people be subjected to the cruel displacements of an irrational economy—or is there a better way? Must we stand by while our liberties are undermined, our resources squandered, our environment polluted—or is there a better way? Must private profit be the nation's driving force—or is there a better way?²

Although there will be disagreement on the answers to these questions, the answers are less important, sociologically, than the willingness to call into question existing social arrangements that many people consider sacred. This is the beginning of the sociological perspective. But being critical is not enough. The sociologist must have a coherent way to make sense of the social world, and this leads us to the second goal of this book—the elaboration of a consistent framework from which to understand and interpret social life.

This book is guided by the assumption that there is an inherent duality in all societies. The realistic analysis of any one society must include both the integrating and stabilizing forces, on the one hand, and the forces that are conducive to malintegration and change, on the other. American society is characterized by harmony and conflict; integration and division; stability and change. This synthesis is crucial if the intricacies of social structure, the mechanisms of social change, and the sources of social problems are to be understood fully.

This objective of achieving a balance between the order and conflict perspectives is not fully realized in this book, however. Although both perspectives are incorporated into each chapter, the scales tend to be tipped in favor of the conflict perspective. This slight imbalance is the conscious product of the way I, as author and teacher, view the structure and mechanisms of society. In addition to presenting what I think is a realistic analysis of society, it counters the prevailing view presented in contemporary sociology textbooks—the order perspective with its implicit sanctification of the status quo. Such a stance is untenable to me, given the spate of social problems that persist in American society. The emphasis of the conflict approach, on the other hand, questions the existing social arrangements, viewing them as sources of social problems, a position with which I agree. Implicit in such a position is the goal of restructuring society along more humane lines.

That I stress the conflict approach over the order model does not suggest that this book is a polemic. To the contrary, the social structure is also examined from a sympathetic view. The existing arrangements do provide for the stability and maintenance of the system. But the point is that by including a relatively large dose of the conflict perspective the discussion is a realistic appraisal of the system rather than a look through rose-colored glasses.

This duality theme will be shown primarily at the societal level in this book. But while the societal level is the focus of our inquiry, the small

group and individual levels are not ignored. The principles that apply to societies are also appropriate for the small social organizations to which we belong, such as families, work groups, athletic teams, churches, and clubs. Just as important, the sociological perspective shows how the individual is affected by groups of all sizes. Moreover, it shows how the identity of the individual is shaped by social forces and how in many important ways the individual's thoughts and actions are determined by group memberships.

The linkage of the individual to social groups will be shown throughout the book. The relationship of the individual to the larger society will be illustrated by special panels. These will examine how societal changes and forces impinge on individuals and the choices available to us as we attempt to cope with these societal trends.

The book is divided into four parts. Part 1 introduces the reader to the sociological perspective, the fundamental concepts of the discipline, and the duality of social life. These chapters will set the stage for an analysis of the structure (organization) and process (change) of American society. The emphasis will be on the characteristics of societies in general and the United States in particular.

Part 2 describes the way human beings are shaped by society. The topics include the values that direct our choices, the social bases of social identity and personality, the mechanisms that control individual and group behavior, and the violation of social expectations—deviance. Throughout this section we examine the forces that, on the one hand, work to make all Americans similar and those that, on the other hand, make us different.

Part 3 examines in detail the various forms of social inequality present in American society. The opening chapter deals with how societies rank people in hierarchies. Also examined are the mechanisms that ensure that some people have a greater share of wealth, power, and prestige than others and the positive and negative consequences of such an arrangement. Other chapters focus on the specific aspects of stratification—poverty, racism, and sexism.

Part 4 discusses another characteristic of all societies—the presence of social institutions. Every society has developed historically a fairly consistent way of meeting its survival needs and those of its members. The family, for example, ensures the regular input of new members, provides for the stable care and protection of the young, and regulates sexual activity. In addition to the family, a separate chapter is devoted to religion, to education, to the economy, and to the polity. The understanding of institutions is vital to the understanding of society because these social arrangements are part of its structure, resist change, and have such a profound impact on the public and private lives of people.

The sociological analysis of American society is especially important and interesting now because of a unique combination of historical and structural factors. No American generation but the present has faced possible extinction from the effects of nuclear weapons and ecological disasters. No American generation but the present has faced the possibility of a future with severe energy and resource shortages that threaten the American values of progress,

growth, and materialism. No generation but the present has grown up with the instant history and the constant violence of television. No generation has undergone such a rapid rate of change. The trend toward greater bureaucratization continues in business, religion, labor, school, sport, and government. All Americans are caught in its impersonal clutches. And, for the first time in American history young people face the prospect of being less successful than their parents.

While these and other changes have occurred with fantastic speed, American institutions have become afflicted with old age, unwilling to change. The intransigence of American institutions in the face of rapid social and technological change has caused a gap which, if not breached, will lead to increasing despair, discontent, alienation, and hostility by dislocated individuals and perhaps the ultimate demise of society.

The problems of American society are of great magnitude, and solutions must be found. But understanding must precede action—and that is one goal of this book.

The analysis of American society is a challenging task. It is frustrating because of the heterogeneity of the population and the complexity of the forces impinging upon American social life. It is frustrating because the diversity within the United States leads to many inconsistencies and paradoxes. Furthermore, it is difficult if not impossible for an American to be objective and consistently rational about his or her society. Nevertheless, the sociological study of American society is fascinating and rewarding. It becomes absorbing as one gains insights about his or her own actions and the behavior of others. Understanding the intricate complex of forces leading to a particular type of social structure or social problem can be liberating and lead toward collective efforts to bring about social change. This book attempts to give the reader just such a sociological perspective.

Finally, I am unabashedly proud of being a sociologist. My hope is that you will capture some of my enthusiasm for exploring and understanding the intricacies and mysteries of social life.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. For a critique of past approaches and a plea for one similar to that used in this volume, see Amitai Etzioni, "The Importance of Humanistic Sociology," *The Chronical of Higher Education* (January 19), 1976, p. 32.
2. "Voting for What We Want," *The Progressive* (November, 1976), p. 5.

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Part 1

The Sociological Approach



1

The Sociological Perspective