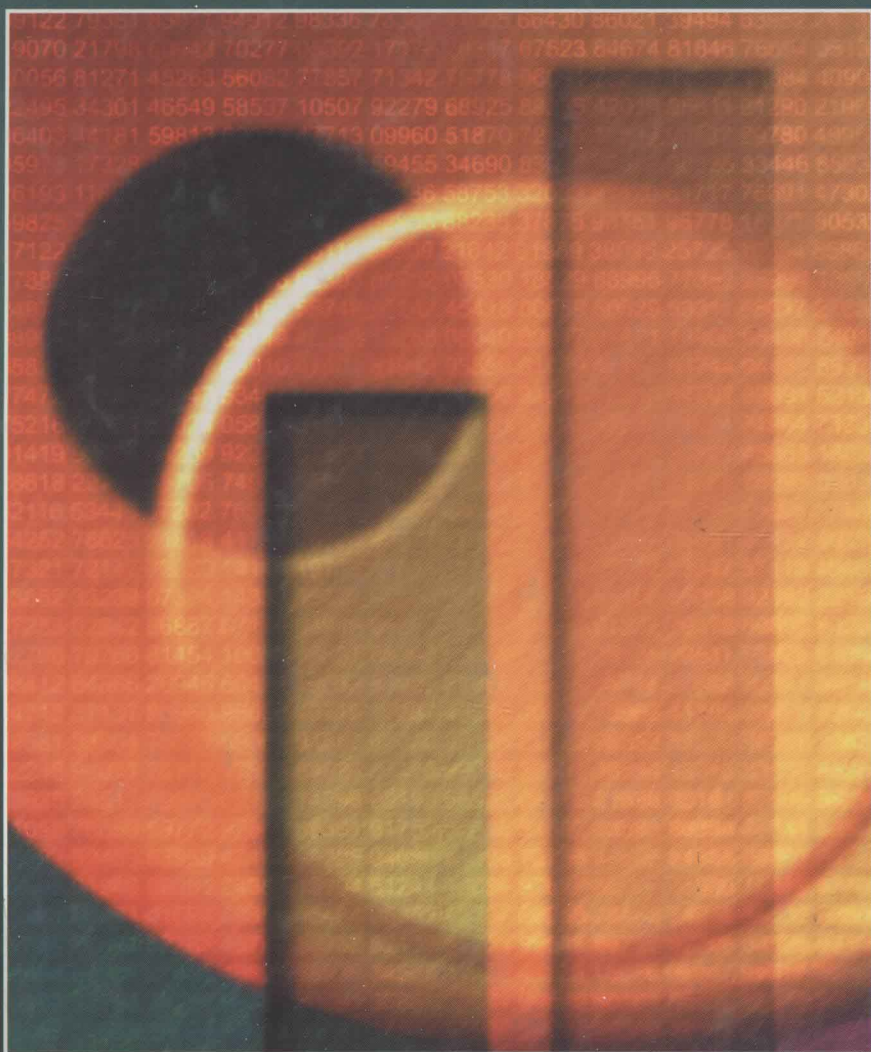


# EXPLORING SOCIAL CHANGE

AMERICA AND THE WORLD  
FOURTH EDITION



CHARLES L. HARPER • KEVIN T. LEICHT

FOURTH EDITION



# Exploring Social Change

## America and the World

Charles L. Harper

*Creighton University*

Kevin T. Leicht

*The University of Iowa*



Prentice  
Hall

Upper Saddle River, NJ 07458

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Harper, Charles L.

Exploring social change : America and the world / Charles L. Harper, Kevin T. Leicht.—4th ed.  
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-13-091838-5

1. Social change. 2. Social change—United States. 3. United States—Social conditions—1945–

I. Leicht, Kevin T. II. Title

HM831 .H285 2002

303.4—dc21

2001054858

AVP, Publisher: Nancy Roberts

Senior Acquisitions Editor: Chris DeJohn

Managing Editor: Sharon Chambliss

Project Manager: Merrill Peterson

Cover Director: Jayne Conte

Cover Design: Bruce Kenselaar

Marketing Manager: Chris Barker

Prepress and Manufacturing Buyer: Mary Ann Gloriande

This book was set in 10/12 Times New Roman by NK Graphics  
and was printed and bound by Maple Vail Book Manufacturing Group.  
The cover was printed by Jaguar Graphics.



© 2002, 1998, 1993, 1989 Pearson Education, Inc.  
Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 07458

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be  
reproduced, in any form or by any means,  
without permission in writing from the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 0-13-091838-5

Pearson Education LTD., London

Pearson Education Australia PTY, Limited, Sydney

Pearson Education Singapore, Pte. Ltd

Pearson Education North Asia Ltd, Hong Kong

Pearson Education Canada, Ltd., Toronto

Pearson Educación de Mexico, S.A. de C.V.

Pearson Education—Japan, Tokyo

Pearson Education Malaysia, Pte. Ltd

Pearson Education, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey

For

**Robert A. Harper (1899–1986)**

**Alma Hagy Harper (1901–1987)**

**Curtis L. Leicht (1932–1967) and**

**Janice M. Leicht**

who gave us our world,

**Anne and Brenda**

who make our worlds beautiful,

and

**Russell, Stan, Erika, and Curtis**

who will inherit our world.



## Preface

This is a book for all those who are curious about social change. It is also about how sociologists study change. It is about the substance of social change in the United States and the contemporary world; it is also about the usefulness of sociological ideas for understanding change and methods of inquiry that have been used to understand social change. We think the topic of social change is of intrinsic interest to everyone, since its pervasive impact is felt by all and is often the cause of considerable perplexity. Sociological perspectives are uniquely suited to illuminate social change because of their holistic treatment of the different aspects of social life that other disciplines (politics, law, economics) address in a more partial way. Sociology is also a lively and contentious discipline, and we have not ignored sociological controversies or omitted complex ideas that defy oversimplification. The book requires some background, but we have tried to write a book for relative newcomers to sociology, avoiding the most arcane jargon and professional idiom for what we hope are clear language and fertile examples. It is about “big” issues, but we have tried to write in a way that engages the life experience of individuals.

The topics of the book are based on what we think is important to communicate about social change based on years of teaching and thinking about it. Others may not agree. It begins with a synoptic overview of recent change in American society. *America* here refers to the United States, and when we refer to other Western Hemispheric nations, we will use their proper names, or other terms like *North America* or *Latin America*. Middle chapters deal with selected change processes and with sociological theories of change. The later chapters are about global change processes in the modern world. A more descriptive overview of the chapter topics and organization of the book occurs at the end of Chapter 1, so we won't elaborate more here.

Writing a book involves the minds and energies of many people besides the authors. Harper would like to acknowledge his indebtedness to five teachers who have been particularly influential in his intellectual development: Ray Cuzzort, Ernest Manheim, Oscar Eggers, Jerry Cloyd, and Jack Siegman. He would also like to thank his students and colleagues at Creighton University who put up with him over the

years through several editions, especially the diverse contributions of Tom Mans, Sue Crawford, and James T. Ault. Harper also thanks Barbara Braden, Dean of the Creighton University Graduate College, for her material support during the completion of the fourth edition. He also thanks professional colleagues for their support and critical feedback over the years, including Prentice Hall reviewers Gerry Cox of Black Hills State University; David Swift of the University of Hawaii; Mark Mantyh of the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee; and Becky M. Trigg of the University of Alabama, Birmingham.

Leicht first and foremost owes an immeasurable debt of gratitude to Charles Harper for his capable guidance and friendship over the past twenty years. He also owes a great deal to James T. Ault for taking a Nebraska boy who was a little wet behind the ears and turning him into a productive member of the social science community. When he was offered the opportunity to help with the revision of this text, he jumped at the chance in part because of the experiences he had as an undergraduate at Creighton University. He sincerely hopes that this text inspires others to think critically about the world around them, whether they decide to become sociologists or not.

We owe a special debt of gratitude to the editorial staff of Prentice Hall, particularly Sharon Chambliss, the supportive and congenial “editor in charge” of the project, and Nancy Roberts, Publisher, who has been a constant source of unobtrusive encouragement and the most human face in a distant corporation.

## A NOTE TO INSTRUCTORS

This is a compact but flexibly organized core text that can be used with a wide variety of supplements. Ideas are connected and developmental, but not so tightly that you can’t omit some chapters or rearrange the order to fit the priorities of different courses. Here are a few suggestions for some optional ways of organizing the course.

If you want a more descriptive course about change in America and the world without much theory, you can omit entirely Parts Two and Three about theory, movements, and innovation, though you may have to decode some discussions later on. Another alternative, more consistent with comparative interests, would be to omit the American materials in Part One entirely, begin with the theory material (Parts Two and Three), skip to the material about technology and innovation (Chapter 10), and then continue through material about development, globalization, population/environment issues, and the future (Part Four). Yet another alternative is a more applied emphasis that asks students to observe change processes close up. For that, we would begin with the American materials (Part One), followed with a chapter about movements (Chapter 7), and then with material about innovation and creating change (Chapter 1)—ending with other material as you see fit. You can, of course, rearrange the sequence by having students read the theory and change process material first, but based on our teaching experience we don’t recommend it. We placed material about change in America first as a means of engaging students before addressing more conceptually demanding issues about theory, models, social movements, and innovation.

We have retained the review questions at the end of each chapter to help students explore the personal implications of large-scale social change processes and to facilitate discussion.

We would like to hear about your experience with the book and about improving it.

Charles Harper  
Department of Sociology and  
Anthropology  
Creighton University  
Omaha, Nebraska 68178  
charper@creighton.edu

Kevin T. Leicht  
Department of Sociology  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa 52242-1401  
kevin-leicht@uiowa.edu



# Contents

## **Preface   viii**

## **Chapter 1**

### **By Way of Introduction   1**

What Is Social Change?   4

Sociology and Social Change   10

What You Can Expect from This Book and How It Is Organized   10

---

## **PART ONE**

### **SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE UNITED STATES**

## **Chapter 2**

### **American Social Trends   13**

Structural Trends   14

Changing Cultural Themes   18

Countertrends and Reactions: Anti- and Postmodernism   22

In Conclusion   24

Thinking Personally about Social Change   25

## **Chapter 3**

### **Change and the Settings of Everyday Life:**

### **Population, Families, and Work   27**

Demographic Change   27

Changing Families   32

Transforming Work   38

In Conclusion   44

Thinking Personally about Social Change   44



**Chapter 4****Economics, Politics, and the American Prospect 46**

- The Changing Economy 46
- Change in the Political System 52
- Change, Problems, and the American Prospect 61
- In Conclusion 65
- Thinking Personally about Social Change 68

---

**PART TWO****EXPLAINING CHANGE****Chapter 5****The Causes and Patterns of Change 70**

- Theory in Sociology 71
- The Causes of Change 72
- Materialistic Perspectives 72
- Idealistic Perspectives 75
- Patterns of Change 81
- In Conclusion 96
- Thinking Personally about Social Change 97

**Chapter 6****Social Theory and Social Change 99**

- Functionalist Theory 100
- Conflict Theory 106
- Interpretive Theory 115
- Multiple Perspectives and Change: Reconciling Agency and Structure 123
- In Conclusion: Large-Scale Change and Human Agency 125
- Thinking Personally about Social Change 125

---

**PART THREE****PROCESSES OF SOCIAL CHANGE****Chapter 7****Social Movements 127**

- What Are Social Movements? 128
- Types of Social Movements 130
- Explaining the Origins of Social Movements 132
- In Conclusion 149
- Thinking Personally about Social Change 149

## **Chapter 8**

### **American Reform Movements and Social Change    151**

- The Social Context of Twentieth-Century American Reform Movements    151
- Social Class and Reform Movements at the Turn of the Twentieth Century    153
- Social Status and Reform Movements at Mid-Twentieth Century    162
- In Conclusion: What Kinds of Change Do Reform Movements Accomplish?    174
- Thinking Personally about Social Change    176

## **Chapter 9**

### **Revolutions    178**

- What Is a Social Revolution?    178
- Theories of Revolution    179
- The Outcomes of Revolution    190
- A World Revolution: The Collapse of the Communist System    190
- In Conclusion: But Was It a Revolution?    206
- Thinking Personally about Social Change    208

## **Chapter 10**

### **Technology, Innovation, and Networks    210**

- Innovation as a Change Process    210
- The Act of Innovation    212
- Sources of Innovation: Social and Cultural    214
- Diffusion: How Innovations Spread    220
- Adoption of Innovation: Social Systems and Individuals    225
- Institutional Change and the Spread of Innovations    226
- Social Networks    228
- In Conclusion: Back at the Information Technology Revolution    232
- Thinking Personally about Social Change    235

## **Chapter 11**

### **Creating Change    236**

- Creating Change in Omaha: Muddling Through and Planning    238
- Basic Change Strategies    243
- The Role of Violence in Creating Change    247
- Mixed and Complex Strategies    250
- Being a Change Agent    254
- The Ethics of Inducing Change    258
- In Conclusion: Some Final Thoughts about the Feasibility of Creating Change    260
- Thinking Personally about Social Change    262

---

**PART FOUR****GLOBAL CHANGE****Chapter 12****The Emerging Global System: Development and Globalization 264**

Two Worlds 265

What Is Development? 267

Uneven Development 268

Developmentalist Thinking: Perspectives and Dimensions 272

Explaining Failed Development 277

Dependency and World Systems Theory 278

Structure and Dynamics of the World System 280

Globalization 286

In Conclusion: Development, Globalization, and Human Progress 291

Thinking Personally about Social Change 293

**Chapter 13****Society, Environment, and Change 294**

Ecological Perspectives on Change and Problems 294

Aspects of Ecological Change and Problems 297

Human Impacts and Global Environmental Change 306

In Conclusion: Societies, Environment, and Global Stability 313

Thinking Personally about Social Change 316

**Chapter 14****World Futures 318**

New World Order or New World Chaos? 319

Looking at the Next Fifty Years 320

Prophetic Visions: Some Longer Views 331

In Conclusion: The Third Revolution 340

Thinking Personally about Social Change 343

**Epilogue: Living in a Rapidly Changing World 344****References 348****Author Index 380****Subject Index 383**

## By Way of Introduction

It is impossible to live in the world today without being bombarded with the reality and pervasiveness of change. The mass media are full of reports of new or continuing crises of grave international import in some little-known part of the world. They are also full of reports about changes in family life, health, and prospects for economic prosperity or decline. And then there are the fascinating and worrisome reports about the dazzling array of technological innovations, such as biotechnology and the computerization of everything, that have the potential to revolutionize our lives. While we live in a world that is pregnant with possibilities, it is also at times a frightening and hazardous world. The pace of change in general, and particularly the rate at which the world is becoming a single though highly disordered system, gives a kind of urgency to the notion that crisis is the ordinary state of social life. While it would be false to say social change is historically new, it is probably correct to say that people today are more likely to perceive change as the normal state of the world. Even though we are frightened and fascinated by change, we have come to expect it. Particularly in modern society, life is a journey, not a home.

We are bombarded by the big events of major world transformations, but social change is also the story of individuals and of differences between generations in families. Let me introduce the topic of social change by contrasting the personal stories about the world of Harper's father and the world of my children. I'll let Harper tell you about the lives of his parents from this description of a conversation with his father.

One day in January some years ago when my parents had come to visit, I walked into the kitchen and observed my father just standing with the refrigerator door open looking into it. When I asked him what he was doing he said, "Well, I was just thinking that we didn't have all these different kinds of food when I was growing up."

My first impulse was to think, here it comes, another story about the good/bad old days. But instead I asked him to explain. He was thinking particularly about the variety of fresh food (grapefruit, oranges, apples, lettuce, etc.) that was unavailable

to him as a child, particularly in January. From that began a series of conversations in which I made a serious attempt to try to understand the world he lived in as a child.

My father was born in 1899 on a small farm in southeastern Missouri. His life, as far as I can tell, was typical of at least half of the American population at that time. Like most farmers of the late nineteenth century, he worked the family farm that was tied to a market economy. His father borrowed money from a bank to buy land, and corn and hogs were sold to make payment to the bank and to purchase seed for next year's crop. But to me the most striking thing about his early life was the extent to which the family farm was a *subsistence* operation and not a money household economy. The family lived—almost literally—on what they could grow, produce, and store. His diet (to return to how I got into this) was mainly what could be made from corn, wheat, and salt pork. At the right time of the year there were fresh vegetables from the garden (some of which were canned for the winter), and in the fall there were a few apples from the tree. They did buy some household goods: kerosene for lamps, cloth, overalls and shoes (one pair a year), coffee, and sugar. There were “special” purchases from the mail order catalogue. Much of the money for these extras came from what his mother could produce in the vegetable garden and sell to the town grocer.

As you can see, his mother made a substantial contribution to the household economy, as did each child, as he or she was old enough to help with the variety of farm and household chores. But though the family was a cooperative affair, his father was the unquestioned dictator of the family. Women and children in those times had no legal rights whatsoever, and only such privileges as were granted by the male head of the household. As in most American families of the time, patriarchy ruled supreme.

The social life of my father's family may seem dull by today's standards. It centered mainly around visiting with the neighbors, going to the country church—“when the weather was good”—and a trip into town on Saturday (an all-day trip). Even though each farm was privately owned and managed, it was embedded in a community life that was strikingly different from that most of us experience today. During planting and harvest times the neighbors gathered in rotation at each other's farms to cooperatively share the labor. Women spent all day cooking for a grand feast after the day's labor. My father described these as exciting social events in an otherwise routine existence.

As a teenager—the term was not used then—my father was interested in the opposite sex (some things *don't* change!). Formal contacts between young men and women were different then. They did not date, but courted. Courtship was understood as a prelude to possible marriage and was under the strict control of parents. At one time my father said that he was courting two different girls, whereupon his mother sat him down and told him to “get serious and quit foolin' around.” “Foolin' around” applied to seriousness of intent, not—as it would today—to premarital sexuality, which was strictly taboo in any case.

There were five children born into the family. One died during childbirth, one died as a teenager from tuberculosis, and one survived into adulthood as an invalid

with what was called “spastic paralysis”—probably what today would be called polio. Only my father and a sister survived to become fully functional adults. This survival rate was not at all unusual for the time.

The thing that distinguished my father and his sister from their peers was that they finished high school (in 1910 only about one out of ten people did). Not only did they finish high school, they both borrowed money from a bank and went to the regional teacher’s college and were certified to teach. When I asked my father why he went into teaching (I expected an inspiring answer), he said that he had decided that there must be a better way to make a living than “walking behind a plow and the ass end of two mules” and that becoming a teacher was one of the only things you could do without having some money to start with. His first job was as the teacher in a nearby one-room country schoolhouse. Thus, he left the family farm in his early twenties and entered a very different world, one that was being born in the twentieth century. It was a world not of self-sufficient farms, but of cities, automobiles, salaries, and bureaucratic organizations. Today he remembers the farm life as a hard one, but, like most older people, he is nostalgic about the lost world of his youth.

The world of my own children is very different, so different that there are few dimensions of it that Harper’s father would recognize. My children have lived their entire lives in college towns, surrounded by well-educated people from all over the world. They take it for granted that everyone goes to college and don’t understand why anyone would think of doing anything else.

Because of improvements in diet and health care, their physical survival was never in question as it was for Harper’s father and his four siblings. Instead, because of the sheer volume of information they are bombarded with from all around the world, they know that some kids like them don’t get enough to eat, others are victims of war and plagues, and adults in their own society get cancer and AIDS. Their general awareness of how other people live and how good they have it is far greater than that of children from prior generations.

The household they live in is embedded in a wired, electronic, credit-based economy. Unlike Harper’s father, all my children’s material needs are purchased in local stores or (increasingly) online through Internet shopping services. These products are produced in remote parts of the world and delivered to suppliers using “just-in-time” delivery systems that instantly respond to changes in demand and supply. These consumer items are purchased with credit and bank debit cards and rarely (if ever) with cash. It is only recently that my children (ages 6 and 10) have discovered that there is any connection between credit cards and actual U.S. currency—that “old fashioned” way of buying things that uses piles of paper with pictures of buildings and politicians on it! The food they consume is grown all over the world, is available during all seasons of the year, and much of it has been genetically altered so that it has no recognizable connection to its plant and animal ancestors in the wild. While Harper’s father was able to observe his parents working on their farm and could see the significance of their work (because it showed up on the dinner table), my children’s parents (both of us) work for pay in large organizations remote from their everyday lives. Our

children only have a vague idea of what we do for a living. Even our paychecks are electronically deposited each month in a bank account in our name.

The social life and entertainments available to them were unimaginable even a generation ago. Both of my children have traveled to distant parts of the United States (from Iowa City, Iowa), and my 10-year-old daughter has traveled overseas. They take cable TV, Pokemon, Sailor Moon, Dragonball Z, PCs and the Internet completely for granted. They spend a good deal of time with peers and relatively little time with their parents. My daughter already talks of boys and knows about what used to be called the “facts of life,” something which Harper’s father was not exposed to until his teen years (at the earliest).

The family life of my children is starkly different as well. We parents have a lot of influence, but there is much more negotiating between them and their parents about rights, duties, and privileges. Many of their friends’ parents are divorced or never married, and we parents make decisions in collaboration with each other and our children rather than in the dictatorial style of the patriarchal past. Marriage, for them, is certainly an option, but it is a distant one and it is certainly not a requirement for taking their place in the adult world.

When my children decide to strike out on their own (a decision that is being postponed until later and later in life), they will face a bewildering and uncertain set of career choices. In fact, the entire concept of a career may not exist. At some point, they will have to contend with the structure of the economy and the job market. They will have to contend with an economy that is not, in fact, open ended.

This is briefly the story of change in the lives of two generations of our families. Their story is not representative of change in the lives of all American families. You might find it interesting to compare their story with stories about change between generations in your own family. Imagine a far-fetched situation. Suppose you are an investigator from another planet researching human life on earth and have just read the story of change in the two generations of our families. You might say: “Well—you have told me about the life of Harper’s father and your children and how they are different. But how did they get to be so different?”

Our answer would be: “To understand why the lives of individuals change as they do, you must understand some things about the broad patterns of social change, such as changes in the economy, in urbanization, and technological change which shape individual and family life in various ways.” In other words, it is always interesting and often easier for us to think about how our individual lives are changing, but to understand more fully how and why this is happening you need to understand the patterns and forces of change in the social worlds of individuals and families. And sociology has a powerful set of ideas to interpret and comprehend these forces and patterns. *That is what this book is about.*

## WHAT IS SOCIAL CHANGE?

For both practical reasons and intellectual curiosity, people have always been fascinated and agitated by the problem of understanding permanence and change. Among

the ancient Greek philosophers, Heraclitus of Ephesus argued that the world was a process in constant flux and development, while his counterpart, Parmenides of Elea, maintained that the world was an indestructible, motionless continuum of matter and space and that change is illusory. This ancient polarization of thought is also found in sociological thinking. We won't spend more time here with this abstract controversy but will only argue that we should not deny the reality of either general processes of stability or change. Both are real, and we recognize one in relation to the other. To deny the reality of either persistence or change doesn't recognize the way people experience the world.

Here is a working definition: *Social change is the significant alteration of social structure and cultural patterns through time.* That's very abstract and begs at least three other questions: What is significant? What is social structure? And what is culture? Significance, we admit, is largely in the eye of the beholder. When you assert that "nothing important has really changed" or that "things have drastically changed," those are judgments about significance. Both in everyday life and social science we make judgments about what is significant and what is trivial, but people with different outlooks can honestly disagree about them. At its root the notion of *social structure* means a persistent network of social relationships in which interaction between persons or groups has become routine and repetitive. At increasingly abstract levels, social structure can be understood as persistent social roles, groups, organizations, institutions, and societies.

But if you were to study only social structure, you would miss important *cultural* aspects of change in our social life. The distinction between social structure and culture is a most basic distinction in social science. It is a conceptual and somewhat artificial distinction, but it is an important and convenient way of focusing on different aspects of social life. If social structure is the network of relationships in which people are embedded, *culture* is the "social software" that people share that provides meaning to social life. Unlike social structure, culture is hard to define in a short abstract way. It is the shared way of living and thinking that includes symbols and language (both verbal and nonverbal), knowledge, beliefs, and values (what is "good" and "bad"), norms (how people are expected to behave), and techniques ranging from common folk recipes to sophisticated technologies and material culture.

The important point is that grasping the whole picture of social change requires that we understand important structural changes (for example, changes in the composition of the population and households, in the size and complexity of organizations, in the economy) and how they are connected to changes in culture (for example, changing definitions, values, problems, fears, hopes, and dreams that people share).

### Some Beginning Clarifications

That's a pretty abstract discussion of a complex process. Here we want to raise six issues to begin sorting out of parts of the process and to preview some of the things we will discuss in more depth in later chapters. These have to do with different (1) types of change, (2) levels of change, (3) time frames of change, (4) causes of



change, (5) relationships of change to human intentions, and (6) some terms often associated with change.

**Kinds of Change.** It is important to note that even the words *change* or *alteration* can mean that there are concretely different things going on. Consider, for example, at least five different ways that structures can be altered. First, there are *changes in personnel*, in which new people with different life histories and experiences are continually entering and leaving established structures. Second, there are *changes in the way parts of structures relate*. These include changed role relationships—such as differences in family roles that we mentioned in our personal stories. On different levels the growing complexity of society and the growing specialization of occupations in the economy are other changes in the way that the parts of structures relate. We will discuss these kinds of change in the next two chapters. Third, there are *changes in the functions of structures*, that is, changes in what they do for society and how they operate. For example, in contemporary America many churches not only serve to promote religious belief, but also function as family counseling and social service agencies, and sometimes as advocates of political change. For example, both fundamentalist Protestant churches and the American Conference of Roman Catholic Bishops have come to function more openly as advocates of political change (in such areas as the legality of prayer in public schools or abortion). Fourth, there are *changes in the relationships between different structures*. For example, since the 1890s American labor-management relations have evolved from what were often uncivil and violent confrontations in the nineteenth century to today’s ritualistic and highly structured negotiations. Chapter 3 more broadly examines the changing connections between the American economic and political systems. Fifth, there is *the emergence of new structures*. For instance, there is evidence that a global system of economic, cultural, and political interactions is emerging. This system is putting new constraints on nation-states and their populations. We will discuss this topic in Chapter 11.

**Levels of Change.** To avoid confusion, we should try to be clear about exactly what is changing, or the levels within which change takes place. The study of change can focus on aggregate individual characteristics, such as changes in attitudes and demographic characteristics such as age or sex. It can focus on the different aspects of culture mentioned previously. It can focus on changes in structural units from small systems to large, inclusive ones.

STRUCTURAL LEVEL	CHANGES
Small group	in roles, communications structure, influence, cliques
Organizations	in structure, hierarchy, authority, productivity
Institutions	in economy, religion, family, education
Society	in stratification, demography, power
Global	in evolution, international relationships, modernization, development, and transnational organizations