

# SOCIOLOGY

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A CRITICAL APPROACH

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**KENNETH J. NEUBECK**  
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# SOCIOLOGY

## A Critical Approach

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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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*To Gig, Michael, Kara, and Christopher Neubeck  
To Cliff, Gillian, and Morgan Silfen Glasberg*



# PREFACE

We share the excitement of those who have looked forward to our completion of *Sociology: A Critical Approach*. Our goal in writing this text is to encourage students to develop, in the words of C. Wright Mills, a "sociological imagination." The text does this by acquainting students with the core concepts of sociology and demonstrating how these concepts can be used to understand (and perhaps change) features of society that help shape the trajectory of their own and others' biographies.

In this text we are particularly concerned that students gain new knowledge of the ways in which global intersocietal relations, societal membership, institutional functioning, class position, race, gender, age, state of able-bodiedness, and sexual orientation affect individuals' life chances. Our "critical approach" to sociology means that we raise analytical questions and explore issues that shed light on features of society that harm people and get in the way of their individual and collective fulfillment, suggesting the need for social change.

*Sociology: A Critical Approach* opens with an introductory chapter in which we discuss the importance of the sociological imagination and the core sociological concepts upon which this imagination relies. We review the major research methods sociologists use to generate knowledge essential to the exercise of the sociological imagination, commenting upon political and ethical concerns to which sociologists must be sensitive when conducting research.

In the first part of the text, students are introduced to core sociological concepts that most sociologists consider to be at the heart of the discipline. We stress the significance of these concepts for analyzing the organization and operation of society, covering topics ranging from the most "macro" (the importance of a society's position in the world-system) to the most "micro" (the impact of socialization on individuals).

The second part of the text focuses on six institutional spheres that are central to the cumulative experiences of society's members. Here students are exposed to bodies of research literature pertaining to social structures with which they have come into contact, but about which

most students have thought very little. In this part of the text we show students how the sociological imagination can be put to work to shed new light on how the institutions they often take for granted affect them—for better or worse.

We close the text with a final chapter on emerging issues—recent problems or trends that people are beginning to confront—which challenge the sociological imagination. In closing the text in this way, we wish to encourage students to utilize their sociological insights and discover that the study of sociology can help them to understand and respond in an empowered way to changing societal conditions they will encounter in the future.

## FEATURES

**Integration of Race, Class, and Gender Issues** Our interest in issues pertaining to race, class, and gender led us to integrate materials on these and related topics into virtually every chapter. Consistent with this approach, Chapter 6 (“Systems of Inequality”) moves beyond the conventional chapter-length treatment of class-based social stratification found in most texts. In Chapter 6 we not only discuss class inequality; we give equal attention to systems of race and gender inequality, as well as systems of inequality based on age, state of able-bodiedness, and sexual orientation.

**Chapter 7 (“Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender”)** This unique chapter flows logically from our treatment of various systems of inequality. In this chapter these systems are viewed as a matrix within which most individuals are simultaneously members of socially dominant and socially subordinate groups. Topics treated in this chapter (such as the ways in which our system of sex inequality affects women who are privileged by virtue of their class and race) increase students’ awareness of the diversity of people’s experiences with inequality, a diversity that traditional treatments of stratification tend to ignore.

**Coherence of Chapters** Each chapter in this text is organized around a central set of questions that guides the chapter’s coherence. Concepts are introduced as vehicles or sociological tools to address these questions. Thus we avoid presenting students with a text that reads like a dictionary of terms. Instead, students see how sociological concepts and perspectives can be usefully mobilized to expand their understanding of social life, the world around them, and their own position and experiences in that world.

**Social Issues/People’s Lives** Each chapter contains a boxed reading in which an individual speaks of life experiences that reflect, to use C. Wright Mills’ terms, “public issues” rather than “personal troubles.” These readings, which we chose to call “Social Issues/People’s Lives,” help to ground sometimes abstract concepts and ideas in terms that are easier for students to grasp. For example, in Chapter 1 a middle-class family confronts difficult times due to corporate layoffs. In Chapter 3, a young man of mixed



racial ancestry describes his struggle to establish his racial identity. In Chapter 4, students will read the words of a military academy cadet who realizes he is gay; and in Chapter 8 a working mother who once needed welfare evocatively recalls others' views of recipients.

**Thinking Critically** Each chapter ends with a series of provocative questions that are intended to promote discussion, debate, and exercise of the sociological imagination. The questions, under the heading "Thinking Critically," encourage students to consider the implications of facts outlined in the chapter and often call upon them to relate these facts to their own lives.

**Suggested Readings, Key Terms, Glossary** To assist students in pursuing interests they develop while reading the chapters, annotated suggested readings are provided. In addition, each chapter contains a list of key terms that are defined in a glossary at the back of the text.

**Graphics** Tables and figures provide data that are useful and relevant to the text discussion. Figures are carefully captioned to assist student understanding.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people have contributed to the successful completion of *Sociology: A Critical Approach*. Our appreciation goes to the staff at McGraw-Hill, with special thanks to Phil Butcher, Jill Gordon, Roberta Meyer, Sheila Gillams, Karen Quigley, Safra Nimrod, and photo researcher Barbara Salz. The following McGraw-Hill reviewers also deserve our thanks for their helpful comments and suggestions: Ben Agger, SUNY-Buffalo; Julie V. Brown, University of North Carolina-Greensboro; Walter E. Clark, St. Louis Community College-Florissant Valley; B. Keith Crew, University of Northern Iowa; Rita Duncan, Tulsa Junior College; David L. Ellison, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute; Sondra Farganis, Vassar College; Mark Gottdiener, SUNY-Buffalo; Linda Grant, University of Georgia; Charles Green, Hunter College; Charles E. Hurst, The College of Wooster; Ray Hutchison, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay; Peter Kivisto, Augustana College; Beth Mintz, University of Vermont; F. Dale Parent, Southeastern Louisiana University; Brenda Phillips, Texas Women's University; Ellen Rosengarten, Sinclair Community College; Beth A. Rubin, Tulane University; Brian T. Smith, University of Southern Mississippi; R. Dale Spady, Northern Michigan University; Kenrick S. Thompson, Northern Michigan University; Lee Van Dorsten, Colorado State University; Ira M. Wasserman, Eastern Michigan University; and Stuart A. Wright, Lamar University. Our colleagues at the University of Connecticut have been very supportive of this project; we especially wish to thank Myra Marx Ferree and Ronald Taylor for their ideas and help.

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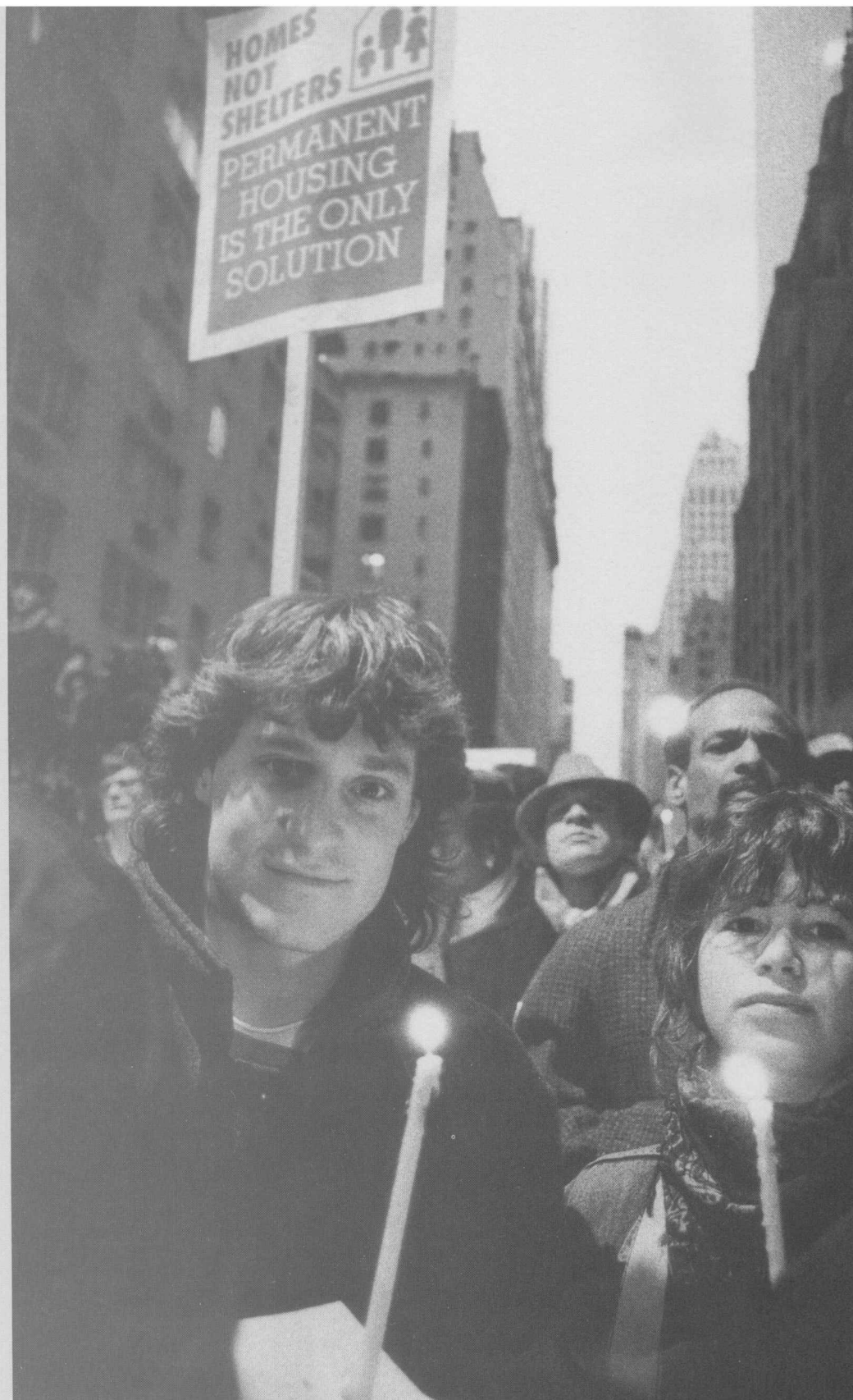
We would also like to thank our respective families for their love and support, patience and good humor: Gig, Michael, Kara, and Christopher Neubeck, and Cliff, Gillian, and Morgan Silfen Glasberg. It is to them that we dedicate this book.

Last, but not least, the authors would like to thank one another. It's been "real"!

*Kenneth J. Neubeck  
Davita Silfen Glasberg*

# SOCIOLOGY

## A Critical Approach



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