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# Preface

Welcome to this new introduction to sociology text! According to recent news stories, thousands of college students are applying for jobs in AmeriCorps, Teach for America, the Peace Corps, and other national, local, and international service programs. Reports on college students find growing interest in voluntarism. Like generations before them, today's students want to make a difference in their society.

The founders of sociology in the United States also wanted to make a difference. A central aim of sociologists in the early 20th century at the University of Chicago and elsewhere was to use sociological knowledge to benefit society. A related aim of sociologists like Jane Addams, W. E. B. Du Bois, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and others since was to use sociological knowledge to understand and alleviate gender, racial, and class inequality.

It is no accident that many sociology instructors and students are first drawn to sociology because they want to learn a body of knowledge that can help them make a difference in the world at large. This new text is designed for this audience. As its subtitle implies, it aims to present not only a sociological understanding of society but also a sociological perspective on how to improve society. In this regard, the text responds to the enthusiasm that “public sociology” has generated after serving as the theme of the 2004 annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, and it demonstrates sociology's relevance for today's students who want to make a difference in the world beyond them.

Several pedagogical features of the book convey this theme:

- Most chapters begin with a “Social Issues in the News” story taken from recent media coverage that recounts an event related to the chapter's topic and uses it as a starting point for the chapter's discussion. Additional material at the end of the chapter discusses promising strategies for addressing the social issues presented in the news story and in the chapter as a whole. The inclusion and discussion of “Social Issues in the News” will help students appreciate the relevance of sociology for newsworthy events and issues.
- Three types of boxes in almost every chapter reflect the U.S. founders' emphasis on sociology and social justice. The first box, “Sociology Making a Difference,” discusses a social issue related to the chapter's topic and shows how sociological insights and findings have been used,

or could be used, to address the issue. The second box, “Learning From Other Societies,” discusses the experience in another nation(s) regarding a social issue related to the chapter; this box helps students appreciate what has worked and not worked in other nations regarding the issue and thus better understand how social reform might be achieved in the United States. The third box, “What Sociology Suggests,” summarizes social policies grounded in sociological theory and research that hold strong potential for addressing issues discussed in the chapter. In addition, many chapters contain tables called “Theory Snapshots.” These tables provide a quick reference tool for students to understand the various theoretical approaches to the sociological topic that the chapter is discussing.

- Most chapters end with a “Using Sociology” vignette that presents a hypothetical scenario concerning an issue or topic from the chapter and asks students to use the chapter’s discussion in a decision-making role involving social change. These vignettes help students connect the chapter’s discussion with real-life situations and, in turn, better appreciate the relevance of sociological knowledge for social reform.
- Drawing on these features and other discussions throughout the book, a unique final chapter, Chapter 22 "Conclusion: Understanding and Changing the Social World", summarizes what students have learned about the potential of sociology to achieve social reform and includes further discussion of the relevance of sociological knowledge for addressing important social issues.

Unnamed Publisher has an exciting model for making affordable textbooks available for students. In this innovative spirit, *Sociology: Understanding and Changing the Social World* makes sociology relevant for today’s students by using a fresh approach that, ironically, takes them back to sociology’s American roots in the use of sociological knowledge to benefit society.