
LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

To Readers and Adopters:

We need to rethink how we approach the study of society within the context of social rebellion, pandemics, global climate change, the transformation of work, and the crumbling liberal democratic order in the United States and around the world. Ours is a time of conflict and division. Texts on any aspect of American society need to be mindful of the conditions in which we live. *Deviance, Morality, and Power* is my attempt to address these challenges.

The first section introduces students to key social science concepts and approaches. Social science began as an attempt to address the crisis faced by modern societies. Students should know that Sumner, Marx, Durkheim, and Weber developed concepts and approaches to make sense of that crisis and contribute to its resolution. “Chicago School” sociologists believed that sociology should guide social reform efforts. I discuss the quite different approaches they developed to address crises much like the ones we face today. In the 1950s, a time of widespread consensus, sociology moved from an investigation of social problems to the study of deviance and social control. I introduce students to the central concepts of the normative and social constructionist theories of deviance and social control.

The key contention of this first section is that the social science concepts and approaches developed to date need to be reconceived to address the problems we currently face. A democratic republic needs to be understood as a kind of society as well as a form of government. The opposition between conflict and consensus approaches need to be transcended. Consensus needs to be viewed as the outcome of conflict and struggle. Anomie needs to be viewed as an intrinsic risk in modern societies rather than as an aspect of the transition to modernity. Moral visions need to be thought of as cognitive frames employed to make sense of social reality. We need to study how widespread consensus is achieved when it is and how it fractures when it does. We need to conceive of moral panics as integral to the process of normalization and marginalization, which are both part of the achievement of widespread but never universal acceptance of a set of values and norms.

The second section of *Deviance, Morality, and Power* demonstrates how, reformulated, the concepts and approaches introduced in the first section can be used to help us make sense of how we got into the fractured state in which we find ourselves and where we are likely to go in the future. In this section, I use concepts and approaches as tools to make sense of social life rather than as labels to place on parts of it.

I take a long-range historical approach to American society. I begin with an account of America in the Gilded Age. What does it mean to say that we are currently living in a second Gilded Age? During both periods, different Americans used competing and conflicting moral visions to make sense of their experiences and social world. When people living in the same society view their lives and society in radically different terms, social interaction is fraught with peril. I try to show how anomie and moral vision can help us make sense of such periods.

In the beginning of the 20th century, progressives developed a vision of the ideals toward which modern societies should strive and suggestions of how those ideals might be achieved. That proved to be the beginning of a long process of social change. Embedding this vision into the American social structure required the formation of a coalition of organizations willing and able to do so, half a century of conflict and struggle, two World Wars, and a great depression. The tenuous consensus developed out of this process didn't last long. Attacked from the Left and then the Right, the coalition fell apart. The attempt to establish a new consensus around a new moral vision and develop a new coalition of organizations capable of embedding a new conservative vision in the 1990s was successful only in the comparatively short run. Attacks on the World Trade Center, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the great recession of 2008, and the Presidency of Donald Trump fractured it and left us in the state we currently find ourselves. While the future is uncertain, I point to a different direction we might go.

Understanding and using concepts and approaches from sociology, political science, cognitive psychology, and contemporary American history to make sense of our current situation is a formidable task.

To help readers meet it, each chapter of *Deviance, Morality, and Power* begins with a set of reflection questions and a list of the major concepts and terms. Each chapter ends with three sets of questions; one examines how well readers have understood the material covered; another asks readers to respond to the material covered; and a third to critically evaluate the material covered.

I hope *Deviance, Morality, and Power* will provide a basis for students, instructors, and general readers to begin the process of coming to terms with the extraordinary times in which we live. I look forward to developing ways to help us use this text in ways that can help us meet the challenges of these difficult times.

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