

# 22 Population, Urbanization, and Environment



**Remember** the definitions of the key terms highlighted in boldfaced type throughout this chapter.



**Understand** ways in which the natural environment reflects the operation of society.



**Apply** demographic concepts and theories to see population trends here and around the world.



**Analyze** the many differences between urban and rural social life.



**Evaluate** the current global population increase and the state of the natural environment.



**Create** a vision of how people can live in a way that is environmentally sustainable.





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## Chapter Overview

This chapter explores three dimensions of social change: population dynamics, urbanization, and increasing threats to the natural environment. Not only are all three important, but they are closely linked as well. ■



There's been a lot of talk about what will happen to our planet when we reach 2012, the year the ancient Mayans claimed some great change would take place. While no one can be sure what the future holds, one thing is all but certain: By the time we usher in the year 2012, our planet will be home to 7 billion people—more than ever before in history.

At one level, a record global population seems like a good thing—more people are alive and living better than ever before. Yet, warning signs point to a future crisis. For one thing, more and more people demand more and more food. With food prices going up everywhere, in some parts of the world the

cost of food is already reaching a crisis level. Similarly, with most of the planet's people now living in cities, the populations of the world's largest cities—found in lower-income nations—are now far greater than ever before. Finally, the soaring population of our planet means that we now consume more and more oil, water, and other resources; in addition, we are creating unprecedented mountains of waste.

It is hard to imagine what a global population of 7 billion means. But consider this—just fifty years ago, the planet's population was less than half as big. So while we can't be sure exactly what future decades will bring, we can be certain that huge changes are underway.

## Demography: The Study of Population

### Apply

When humans first began to cultivate plants some 12,000 years ago, Earth's entire *Homo sapiens* population was around 5 million, about the number living in just the state of Colorado today. Very slow growth pushed the global total in 1 C.E. to perhaps 300 million, or about the current population of the United States.

Starting around 1750, world population began to spike upward. We now add more than 80 million people to the planet each year; today, the world holds 6.9 billion people (Population Reference Bureau, 2010).

The causes and consequences of this drama are the basis of **demography**, the study of human population. Demography (from Greek, meaning “description of people”) is a cousin of sociology that analyzes the size and composition of a population and studies how and why people move from place to place. Demographers not only collect statistics but also raise important questions about the effects of population growth and suggest how it might be controlled. The following sections present basic demographic concepts.

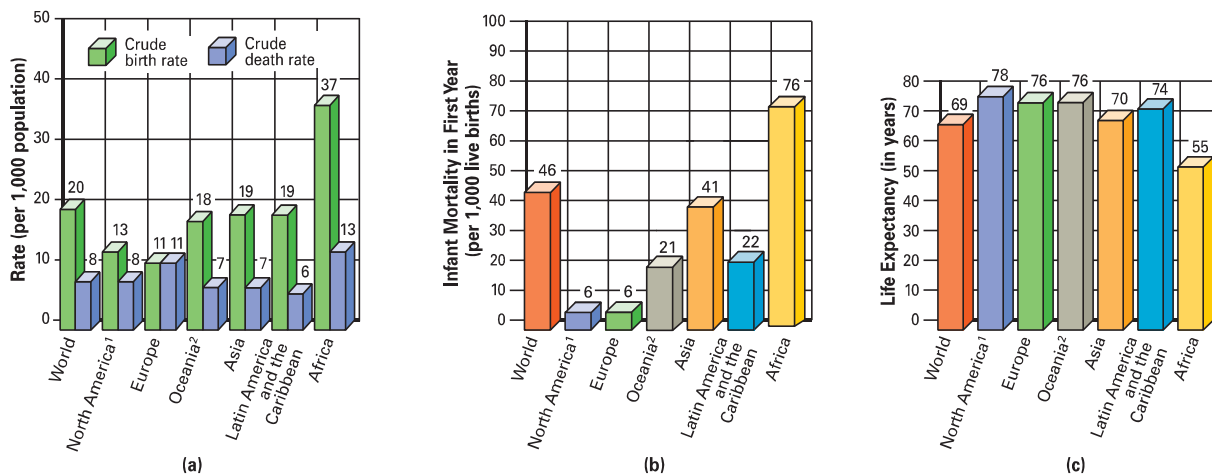
## Fertility

The study of human population begins with how many people are born. **Fertility** is the incidence of childbearing in a country's population. During her childbearing years, from the onset of menstruation (typically in the early teens) to menopause (usually in the late forties), a woman is capable of bearing more than twenty children. But *fecundity*, or maximum possible childbearing, is sharply reduced by cultural norms, finances, and personal choice.

Demographers describe fertility using the **crude birth rate**, the number of live births in a given year for every 1,000 people in a population. To calculate a crude birth rate, divide the number of live births in a year by the society's total population, and multiply the result by 1,000. In the United States in 2009, there were 4.1 million live births in a population of 307 million, yielding a crude birth rate of 13.4 (Hamilton et al., 2010).

**January 18, Coshocton County, Ohio.** Having just finished the mountains of meat and potatoes that make up a typical Amish meal, we have gathered in the living room of Jacob Raber, a member of this rural Amish community. Mrs. Raber, a mother of four, is telling us about Amish life. “Most of the women I know have five or six children,” she says with a smile, “but certainly not everybody—some have eleven or twelve!”

A country's birth rate is described as “crude” because it is based on the entire population, not just women in their childbearing years. In addition, this measure ignores differences between various categories of the population: Fertility among the Amish, for example, is quite high,



## Global Snapshot

FIGURE 22–1 (a) Crude Birth Rates and Crude Death Rates, (b) Infant Mortality Rates, and (c) Life Expectancy around the World, 2010

By world standards, North America has a low birth rate, an average death rate, a very low infant mortality rate, and high life expectancy.

<sup>1</sup> United States and Canada. <sup>2</sup> Australia, New Zealand, and South Pacific Islands.

Source: Population Reference Bureau (2010).

and fertility among Asian Americans is low. But the crude measure is easy to calculate and allows rough comparisons of the fertility of one country or region in relation to others. Part (a) of Figure 22–1 shows that on a global scale the crude birth rate of North America is low.

### Mortality

Population size also reflects **mortality**, the incidence of death in a country's population. To measure mortality, demographers use the **crude death rate**, the number of deaths in a given year for every 1,000 people in a population. This time, we take the number of deaths in a year, divide by the total population, and multiply the result by 1,000. In 2009, there were 2.4 million deaths in the U.S. population of 307 million, yielding a crude death rate of 7.8 (Kochanek et al., 2011). Part (a) of Figure 22–1 shows that this rate is about average.

A third useful demographic measure is the **infant mortality rate**, the number of deaths among infants under one year of age for each 1,000 live births in a given year. To compute infant mortality, divide the number of deaths of children under one year of age by the number of live births during the same year, and multiply the result by 1,000. In 2009, there were 26,531 infant deaths and 4.1 million live births in the United States. Dividing the first number by the second and multiplying the result by 1,000 yields an infant mortality rate of

6.47. Part (b) of Figure 22–1 indicates that by world standards, North American infant mortality is very low.

But remember that differences exist among various categories of people. For example, African Americans, with nearly three times the burden of poverty as whites, have an infant mortality rate of 12.7—more than twice the white rate of 5.3.

Low infant mortality greatly raises **life expectancy**, the average life span of a country's population. U.S. males born in 2009 can expect to live 75.7 years, and females can look forward to 80.6 years. As part (c) of Figure 22–1 shows, life expectancy in North America is twenty-three years greater than is typical of low-income countries of Africa.

### Migration

Population size is also affected by **migration**, the movement of people into and out of a specified territory. Movement into a territory, or **immigration**, is measured as an *in-migration rate*, calculated as the number of people entering an area for every 1,000 people in the population. Movement out of a territory, or **emigration**, is measured in terms of an *out-migration rate*, the number leaving for every 1,000 people. Both types of migration usually occur at the same time; the difference between them is the *net migration rate*.

All nations experience internal migration, movement within their borders from one region to another. National Map 22–1 shows

#### demography the study of human population

**fertility** the incidence of childbearing in a country's population

**crude birth rate** the number of live births in a given year for every 1,000 people in a population

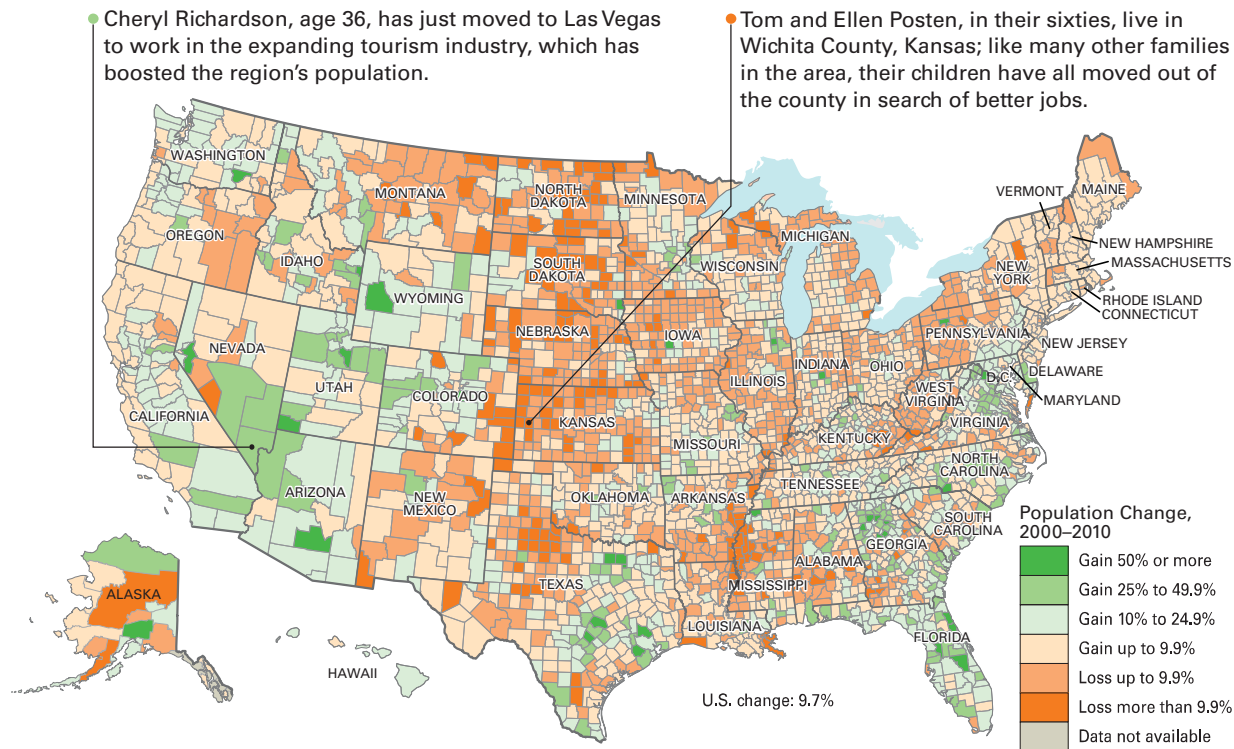
**mortality** the incidence of death in a country's population

**crude death rate** the number of deaths in a given year for every 1,000 people in a population

**infant mortality rate** the number of deaths among infants under one year of age for each 1,000 live births in a given year

**immigration** the movement of people into and out of a specified territory





## Seeing Ourselves

### NATIONAL MAP 22–1 Population Change across the United States

This map shows that between 2000 and 2010, population moved from the heartland of the United States toward the coasts. What do you think is causing this internal migration? What categories of people do you think remain in counties that are losing population?

✪ **Explore** population density in your local community and in counties across the United States on [mysoclab.com](http://mysoclab.com)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2011).

where the U.S. population is moving and the places left behind (notice the gains in the Western states and along the East coast, and the heavy losses in the Plains States in the middle of the country).

Migration is sometimes voluntary, as when people leave a small town and move to a larger city. In such cases, “push-pull” factors are typically at work; a lack of jobs “pushes” people to move, and more opportunity elsewhere “pulls” them to a larger city. Migration can also be involuntary, as during the forced transport of 10 million Africans to the Western Hemisphere as slaves or when Hurricane Katrina forced tens of thousands of people to flee New Orleans.

## Population Growth

Fertility, mortality, and migration all affect the size of a society’s population. In general, rich nations (such as the United States) grow as much from immigration as from natural increase; poorer nations (such as Pakistan) grow almost entirely from natural increase.

To calculate a population’s natural growth rate, demographers subtract the crude death rate from the crude birth rate. The natural growth rate of the U.S. population in 2009 was 5.6 per 1,000 (the crude birth rate of 13.4 minus the crude death rate of 7.8), or about 0.6 percent annual growth.

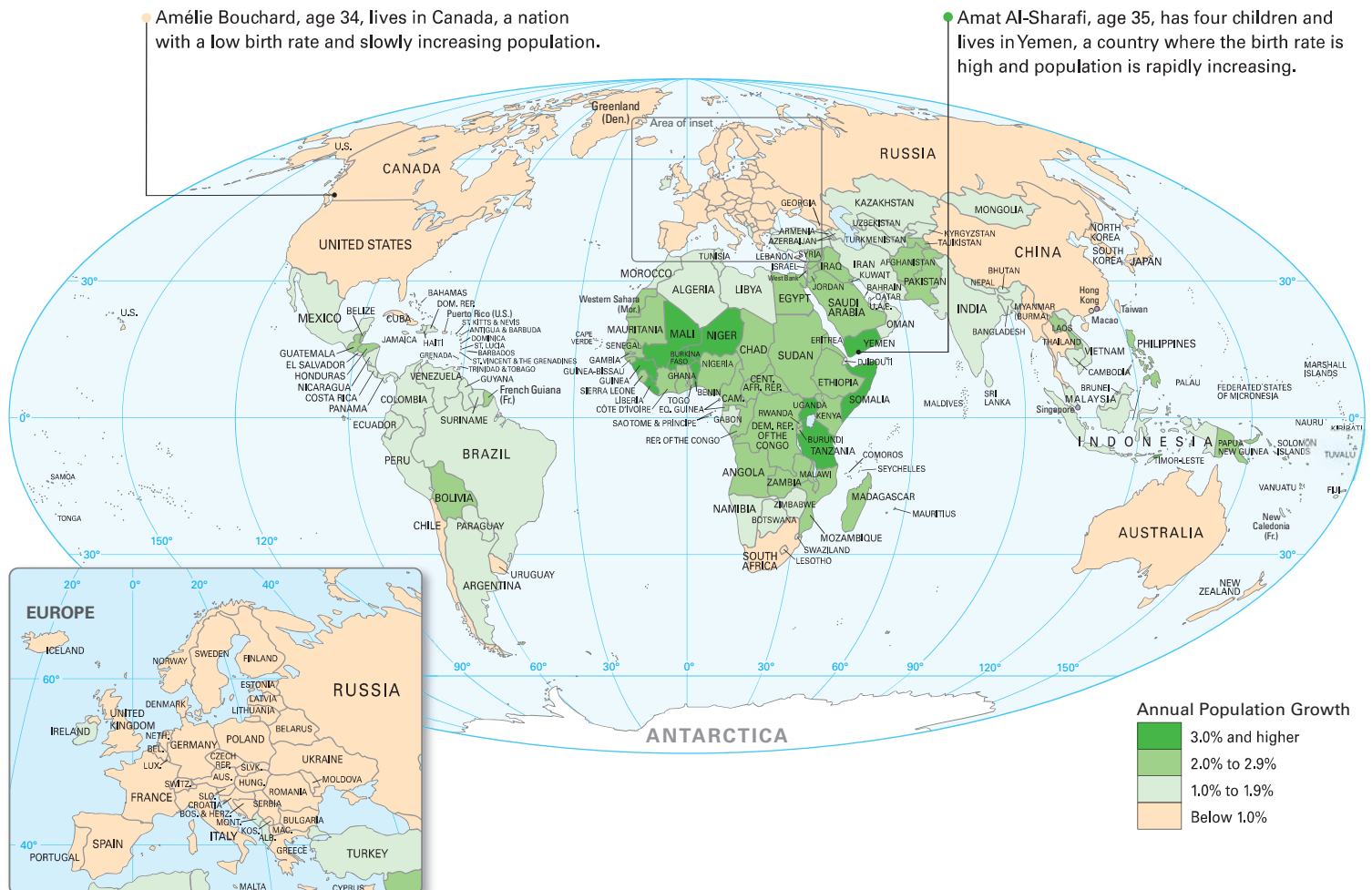
Global Map 22–1 shows that population growth in the United States and other high-income nations is well below the world average of 1.2 percent. Earth’s low-growth continents are Europe (currently showing no growth) and North America (0.6 percent). Close to the global average are Oceania (1.1 percent), Asia (1.2 percent), and Latin America (1.3 percent). The highest-growth region in the world is Africa (2.4 percent).

A handy rule of thumb for estimating a nation or region’s growth is to divide the number 70 by the population growth rate; this yields the *doubling time* in years. Thus an annual growth rate of 2 percent (found in the Latin American nations of Bolivia, Honduras, and Belize) doubles a population in thirty-five years, and a 3 percent growth rate (found in the African nations of Niger, Mali, and Somalia) drops the doubling time to just twenty-three years. The rapid population growth of the poorest countries is deeply troubling because these countries can barely support the populations they have now.

## Population Composition

Demographers also study the makeup of a society’s population at a given point in time. One variable is the **sex ratio**, *the number of males for every 100 females in a nation’s population*. In 2009, the sex ratio in the United States was 97 (97.4 males for every 100 females). Sex ratios





## Window on the World

### GLOBAL MAP 22-1 Population Growth in Global Perspective

The richest countries of the world—including the United States, Canada, and the nations of Europe—have growth rates below 1 percent. The nations of Latin America and Asia typically have growth rates around 1.5 percent, a rate that doubles a population in forty-seven years. Africa has an overall growth rate of 2.4 percent (despite only small increases in countries with a high rate of AIDS), which cuts the doubling time to twenty-nine years. In global perspective, we see that a society's standard of living is closely related to its rate of population growth: Population is rising fastest in the world regions that can least afford to support more people.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2011).

are usually below 100 because, on average, women outlive men. In places such as Plainville, Kansas, which has an aging population, the sex ratio is only 89, or 89 males for every 100 females. In India, however, the sex ratio is 108 because, not only is the population much younger, but also many parents value sons more than daughters and may either abort a female fetus or, after birth, give more care to their male children, raising the odds that a female child will die.

A more complex measure is the **age-sex pyramid**, a graphic representation of the age and sex of a population. Figure 22-2 on page 516 presents the age-sex pyramids for the populations of the United States and Mexico. Higher mortality with advancing age gives these figures a rough pyramid shape. In the U.S. pyramid, the bulge in the middle reflects high birth rates during the *baby boom* from the mid-1940s to

the mid-1960s. The contraction for people in their twenties and thirties reflects the subsequent *baby bust*. The birth rate of 13.4 in 2009 is almost half what it was (25.3) at the height of the baby boom in 1957.

Comparing the U.S. and Mexican age-sex pyramids reveals different demographic trends. The pyramid for Mexico, like that of other lower-income nations, is wide at the bottom (reflecting higher birth rates) and narrows quickly by what we would call middle age (due to higher mortality). In short, Mexico is a much younger society, with a median age of twenty-seven compared to thirty-seven in the United States. With a larger share of females still in their child-bearing years, Mexico's crude birth rate (19) is considerably higher than our own (13.4), and its annual rate of population growth (1.1 percent) is almost twice the U.S. rate (0.6 percent).



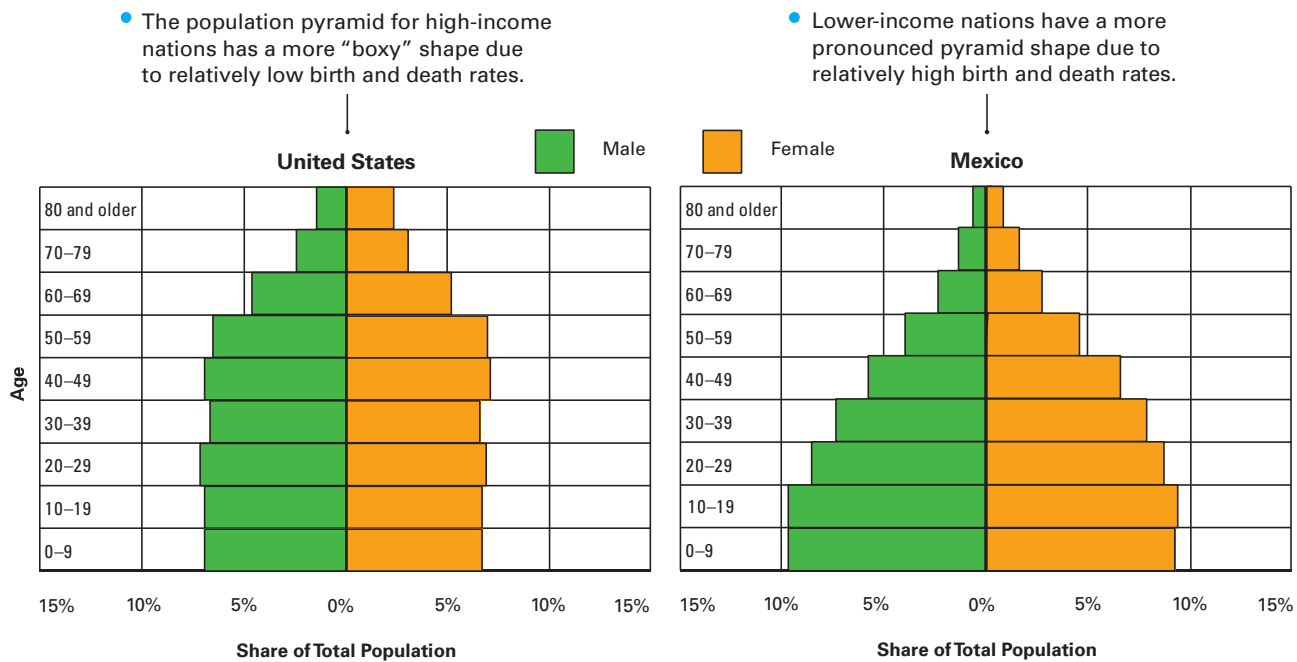


FIGURE 22–2 Population Age-Sex Pyramids for the United States and Mexico, 2011

By looking at the shape of a country’s population pyramid, you can tell its level of economic development and predict future levels of population increase.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2011).

## History and Theory of Population Growth

### Analyze

In the past, people wanted large families because human labor was the key to productivity. In addition, until rubber condoms were invented in the mid-1800s, prevention of pregnancy was uncertain at best. But high death rates from infectious diseases put a constant brake on population growth.

A major demographic shift began about 1750 as the world’s population turned upward, reaching the 1 billion mark by 1800. This milestone (which took all of human history to reach) was repeated barely a century later in 1930, when a second billion people were added to the planet. In other words, not only was population increasing, but the *rate* of growth was accelerating as well. Global population reached 3 billion by 1962 (just thirty-two years later) and 4 billion by 1974 (only twelve years after that). The rate of world population increase has slowed recently, but our planet passed the 5 billion mark in 1987, the 6 billion mark in 1999, and now stands at 6.9 billion (2010). In no previous century did the world’s population even double; in the twentieth century, it *quadrupled*.

Currently, the world is gaining 83 million people each year; 97 percent of this increase is in poor countries. Experts predict that Earth’s population will reach 7 billion very soon and will climb more slowly to about 9 billion by 2050 (United Nations Population Reference Division, 2009). Given the world’s troubles feeding the present population, such an increase is a matter of urgent concern.

## Malthusian Theory

The sudden population spurt 250 years ago sparked the development of demography. Thomas Robert Malthus (1766–1834), an English economist and clergyman, warned that population increase would soon lead to social chaos. Malthus (1926, orig. 1798) calculated that population would increase in what mathematicians call a *geometric progression*, illustrated by the series of numbers 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, and so on. At such a rate, Malthus concluded, world population would soon soar out of control.

Food production would also increase, Malthus explained, but only in *arithmetic progression* (as in the series 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and so on) because even with new agricultural technology, farmland is limited. Thus Malthus presented a distressing vision of the future: people reproducing beyond what the planet could feed, leading ultimately to widespread starvation and war over what resources were left.

Malthus recognized that artificial birth control or abstinence might change his prediction. But he considered one morally wrong and the other impractical. Famine and war therefore stalked humanity in Malthus’s mind, and he was justly known as “the dismal parson.”

• **Evaluate** Fortunately, Malthus’s prediction was flawed. First, by 1850, the European birth rate began to drop, partly because children were becoming an economic liability rather than an asset and partly because people began using artificial birth control. Second, Malthus underestimated human ingenuity: Modern drip-irrigation techniques, advanced fertilizers, and effective pesticides increased farm production and saved vital resources far more than he could have imagined (Yemma, 2011).



Some people criticized Malthus for ignoring the role of social inequality in world abundance and famine. For example, Karl Marx (1967, orig. 1867) objected to viewing suffering as a “law of nature” rather than the curse of capitalism. More recently, “critical demographers” have claimed that saying poverty is caused by high birth rates in low-income countries amounts to blaming the victims. On the contrary, they see global inequality as the real issue (Horton, 1999; Kuumba, 1999).

Still, Malthus offers an important lesson. Habitable land, clean water, and fresh air are limited resources, and greater economic productivity has taken a heavy toll on the natural environment. In addition, medical advances have lowered death rates, pushing up world population. Common sense tells us that no level of population growth can go on forever. People everywhere must become aware of the dangers of population increase.

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** What did Malthus predict about human population increase? About food production? What was his overall conclusion?



This street scene in Old Delhi, India, conveys the vision of the future found in the work of Thomas Robert Malthus, who feared that population increase would overwhelm the world’s resources. Can you explain why Malthus had such a serious concern about population? How is demographic transition theory a more hopeful analysis?

## Demographic Transition Theory

A more complex analysis of population change is **demographic transition theory**, a thesis that links population patterns to a society’s level of technological development. Figure 22–3 shows the demographic consequences at four levels of technological development.

Preindustrial, agrarian societies (Stage 1) have high birth rates because of the economic value of children and the absence of birth control. Death rates are also high because of low living standards and limited medical technology. Deaths from outbreaks of disease cancel out births, so population rises and falls only slightly over time. This was the case for thousands of years in Europe before the Industrial Revolution.

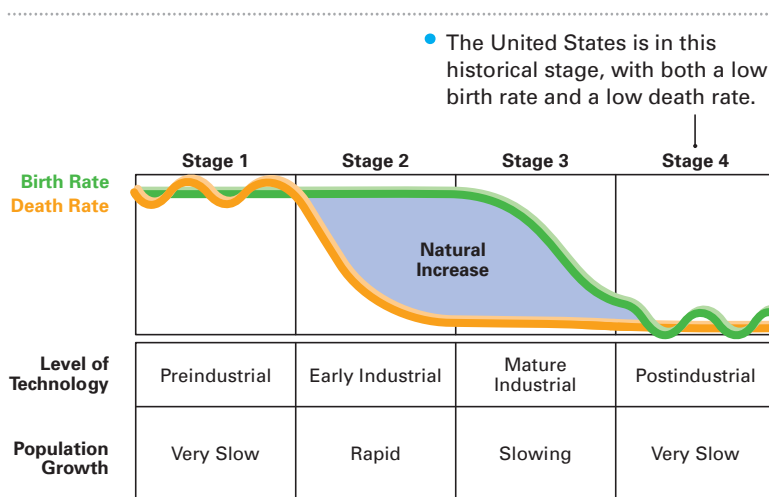
Stage 2, the onset of industrialization, brings a demographic transition as death rates fall due to greater food supplies and scientific medicine. But birth rates remain high, resulting in rapid population growth. It was during Europe’s Stage 2 that Malthus formulated his ideas, which accounts for his pessimistic view of the future. The world’s poorest countries today are in this high-growth stage.

In Stage 3, a mature industrial economy, the birth rate drops, curbing population growth once again. Fertility falls because most children survive to adulthood and because high living standards make raising children expensive. In short, affluence transforms children from economic assets into economic liabilities. Smaller families, made possible by effective birth control, are also favored by women working outside the home. As birth rates follow death rates downward, population growth slows further.

Stage 4 corresponds to a postindustrial economy in which the demographic transition is complete. The birth rate keeps falling,

partly because dual-income couples gradually become the norm and partly because the cost of raising children continues to increase. This trend, linked to steady death rates, means that population grows only very slowly or even decreases. This is the case today in Japan, Europe, and the United States.

**Evaluate** Demographic transition theory suggests that the key to population control lies in technology. Instead of the runaway population increase feared by Malthus, this theory sees technology slowing growth and spreading material plenty.



**FIGURE 22–3 Demographic Transition Theory**

Demographic transition theory links population change to a society’s level of technological development.

**Watch** the video “Population Growth and Decline” on [mysoclab.com](https://mysoclab.com)

Demographic transition theory is linked to modernization theory, one approach to global development discussed in Chapter 12 (“Global Stratification”). Modernization theorists are optimistic that poor countries will solve their population problems as they industrialize. But critics, notably dependency theorists, strongly disagree. Unless there is a redistribution of global resources, they maintain, our planet will become increasingly divided into industrialized “haves,” enjoying low population growth, and nonindustrialized “have-nots,” struggling in vain to feed more and more people.

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** Explain the four stages of demographic transition theory.

## Global Population Today: A Brief Survey

What can we say about population in today’s world? Drawing on the discussion so far, we can identify important patterns and reach several conclusions.

### The Low-Growth North

When the Industrial Revolution began in the Northern Hemisphere, the population increase in Western Europe and North America was a high 3 percent annually. But in the centuries since, the growth rate has steadily declined, and in 1970, it fell below 1 percent. As our postindustrial society settles into Stage 4, the U.S. birth rate is at about the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman, a point demographers term **zero population growth**, *the rate of reproduction that maintains population at a steady level*. In 2010, eighty-three nations, almost all of them high-income countries, were at or below the point of zero population growth.

Among the factors that serve to hold down population in these postindustrial societies are a high proportion of men and women in the labor force, rising costs of raising children, trends toward later marriage and singlehood, and widespread use of contraceptives and abortion.

In high-income nations, then, population increase is not the pressing problem that it is in poor countries. On the contrary, many

governments in high-income countries, including Italy and Japan, are concerned about a future problem of *underpopulation* because declining population size may be difficult to reverse and because the swelling ranks of the elderly can look to fewer and fewer young people for support (Population Reference Bureau, 2010; United Nations Development Programme, 2010; El Nasser & Overberg, 2011).

### The High-Growth South

Population is a critical problem in poor nations of the Southern Hemisphere. No nation of the world lacks industrial technology entirely; demographic transition theory’s Stage 1 applies today to remote rural areas of low-income nations. But much of Latin America, Africa, and Asia is at Stage 2, with a mix of agrarian and industrial economies. Advanced medical technology, supplied by rich countries, has sharply reduced death rates, but birth rates remain high. This is why lower-income countries now account for about 82 percent of Earth’s people and 97 percent of global population increase.

In some of the world’s poorest countries, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Africa, women still have, on average, more than six children during their lifetimes. But in most poor countries, birth rates have fallen from about six children per woman (typical in 1950) to about three. But this level of fertility is still high enough to make global poverty much worse. This is why leaders in the battle against global poverty point to the importance of reducing fertility rates in low-income nations.

Notice, too, that a key element in controlling world population growth is improving the status of women. Why? Because of this simple truth: Give women more life choices and they will have fewer children. History has shown that women who are free to decide when and where to marry, bear children as a matter of choice, and have access to education and to good jobs will limit their own fertility (Axinn & Barber, 2001; Roudi-Fahimi & Kent, 2007).

### The Demographic Divide

High- and low-income nations display very different population dynamics, a gap that is sometimes called the *demographic divide*. In Italy, a high-income nation with very low growth, women average just 1.4 children in their lifetimes. Such a low birth rate means that the number of annual births is less than the number of deaths. This means that at the moment, Italy is actually *losing* population. Looking ahead to 2050, and even assuming some gains from immigration, Italy’s population is projected to be about the same as it is today. But the share of elderly people in Italy—now 20 percent—will only increase as time goes on.

How different the patterns are in a low-income nation such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo. There, women still average six to seven children, so even with a high mortality rate, this nation’s population will more than double by 2050. The share of elderly people is extremely low—about 3 percent—and half that country’s people are below the age of sixteen. With such a high growth rate, it is no surprise that the problem of poverty is bad and getting worse: About three-fourths of the people are undernourished (Population Reference Bureau, 2010).



Fertility in the United States has fallen during the past century and is now quite low. But some categories of the U.S. population have much higher fertility rates. One example is the Amish, a religious society living in rural areas of Ohio, Pennsylvania, and other states. It is common for Amish couples to have five, six, or more children. Why do you think the Amish favor large families?



## Thinking About Diversity: Race, Class, and Gender



## Where Are the Girls? China's One-Child Policy

The parents had argued for hours. But Yang, the father, was determined, and Jianying, the mother, was exhausted. Finally, Yang wrested the baby from Jianying's arms. The decision was made; the girl had to go. Yang put several extra layers of clothing on his daughter and lay the newborn in a cardboard box lined with blankets. Next to her, he placed a small bottle of milk. Then Yang lifted the box and carried it off into the dark night toward the distant village, leaving behind his wife sobbing, "Yang, I beg you, bring back my baby!"

Yet in her heart, she too knew that this must be done. Half an hour later, Yang arrived in the village and found his way to the local school. He kissed his daughter goodbye and set her makeshift crib on the steps of the school, knowing that when dawn broke she would be found by school officials and cared for. With tears in his eyes, Yang said a quick prayer to his ancestors to keep the baby safe from harm. Then he turned and again disappeared into the night, knowing that he would never see or hear from her again.

This story may be heartbreaking, but it is one that has occurred tens of thousands of times in China. What would prompt parents to give up a child? Why would a father abandon his daughter in a public place? The answer lies in China's population control policy and the nation's cultural traditions.

Back in the 1970s, the high Chinese birth rate was fueling a rapid population increase. Government leaders could see that the country's economic development depended on controlling population growth. As a result, they passed a law stating that a family can have only one child. Couples who follow the one-child policy can expect rewards such as a better job, a higher salary, and maybe even a larger apartment. On the other hand, parents who violate the law by having a second child face a stiff fine, and their second child may not be eligible for educational and health care benefits.

The government actively promotes the one-child message in the mass media, in popular songs, and in the schools. But

education is not the government's only tactic; enforcement officials can be found in most neighborhoods and workplaces. Most Chinese willingly comply with the policy, praising it as good for the country. Those who find it to be heavy-handed government regulation of people's personal lives must face the consequences.

Modern China is determined to control population increase. But China is also a country steeped in a tradition of male dominance. If government rules permit only one child, most families would prefer a boy. Why? Parents see boys as a better investment because sons will carry on the family name and will honor the obligation to care for their aging parents. On the other hand, girls will end up caring for their *husbands'* parents, leading most Chinese to see raising daughters as a waste of precious resources. The Chinese government has expanded women's rights and opportunities, but patriarchal traditions are deeply rooted in the country's history, and attitudes change slowly.

Around the world, the one-child policy has attracted both praise and condemnation. On the positive side, analysts agree that it has succeeded in its goal of reducing the rate of population increase. This trend, in turn, has helped raise living standards and lifted China to the ranks of middle-income nations. Many one-child families are happy with the added income from women who now work outside the home, and parents now have more to spend on a child's schooling.



China's one-child policy is advertised on billboards throughout the country.

But the one-child policy also has a dark side, which is shown in the story that began this box. Since the law was passed, as many as 1 million girls have "disappeared." In some cases, parents who learn the woman is carrying a female fetus may choose abortion so they can "try again." In other cases, family members decide to kill a female infant soon after birth. In still other cases, girls survive but are never recorded in the birth statistics, so that parents can try again to have a son. Such girls grow up as "noncitizens" who can never go to school or receive treatment at a local health clinic. Finally, some parents, like those described earlier, give up or abandon their daughter in the hope that the child may find a home elsewhere.

China's one-child policy has certainly held population increase in check. Between 2010 and 2025, China's population is projected to increase by about 10 percent, below the figure of 13 percent for the United States. But China's population control policy has had a dramatic toll on the country's female population. In one recent year, the nation's birth records showed almost 1 million fewer girls than boys. The Chinese population is now about 250 million lower than it would have been without the one-child policy, but the country's population is also steadily becoming more and more male.

### What Do You Think?

1. Point to the reasons China's one-child policy has attracted praise and also blame. On balance, do you think this is a good policy? Can you think of a better way to control population? Explain.
2. What about cases where parents think they can afford additional children? Should family size be a couple's decision? Or does government have a responsibility to look out for the entire country's well-being?
3. Do you now understand why almost all of the babies U.S. parents adopt from China are girls?

Sources: Hesketh, Lu, & Xing (2005), Baochang et al. (2007), Yardley (2008), McGurn (2011), and El Nasser & Overberg (2011).

In sum, a demographic divide now separates rich countries with low birth rates and aging populations from poor countries with high birth rates and very young populations. Just as humanity has devised ways to reduce deaths around the world, it must now bring down pop-

ulation growth, especially in poor countries where projections suggest a future as bleak as that imagined by Thomas Malthus centuries ago.

China, described in the Thinking About Diversity box, stands out as a nation that has taken a strong stand on reducing pop-

ulation increase. That country's controversial one-child policy, enacted back in the 1970s, has reduced China's population by about 250 million.

## Urbanization: The Growth of Cities

### Understand

**October 8, Hong Kong.** The cable train grinds to the top of Victoria Peak, where we behold one of the world's most spectacular vistas: the city of Hong Kong at night! A million bright, colorful lights ring the harbor as ships, ferries, and traditional Chinese junks slowly slip by. Day or night, few places match Hong Kong for sheer energy: This small city is as economically productive as the state of Wisconsin or the nation of Finland. We could sit here for hours entranced by the spectacle of Hong Kong.

Throughout most of human history, the sights and sounds of great cities such as Hong Kong, Paris, and New York were simply unimaginable. Our distant ancestors lived in small, nomadic groups, moving as they depleted vegetation or hunted migratory game. The tiny settlements that marked the emergence of civilization in the Middle East some 12,000 years ago held only a small fraction of Earth's people. Today, the largest three or four cities of the world hold as many people as the entire planet did back then.

**Urbanization** is the concentration of population into cities. Urbanization redistributes population within a society and transforms many patterns of social life. We will trace these changes in terms of three urban revolutions: the emergence of cities 10,000 years ago, the development of industrial cities after 1750, and the explosive growth of cities in poor countries today.

## The Evolution of Cities

Cities are a relatively new development in human history. Only about 12,000 years ago did our ancestors begin living in permanent settlements, which set the stage for the *first urban revolution*.

### The First Cities

As explained in Chapter 4 ("Society"), hunting and gathering forced people to move all the time; however, once our ancestors discovered how to domesticate animals and cultivate crops, they were able to stay in one place. Raising their own food also created a material surplus, which freed some people from food production and allowed them to build shelters, make tools, weave cloth, and take part in religious rituals. The emergence of cities led to both higher living standards and job specialization.

The first city that we know of was Jericho, which lies to the north of the Dead Sea in what is now the West Bank. When first settled some 10,000 years ago, it was home to only 600 people. But as the centuries passed, cities grew to tens of thousands of people and became the centers of vast empires. By 3000 B.C.E., Egyptian cities flourished, as did cities in China about 2000 B.C.E. and in Central and South America about 1500 B.C.E. In North America, however, only a few Native American societies formed settlements; widespread urbanization had to await the arrival of European settlers in the seventeenth century.

### Preindustrial European Cities

European cities date back some 5,000 years to the Greeks and later the Romans, both of whom created great empires and founded cities across Europe, including Vienna, Paris, and London. With the fall of the Roman Empire, the so-called Dark Ages began as people withdrew into defensive walled settlements and warlords battled for territory. Only in the eleventh century did Europe become more peaceful; trade flourished once again, allowing cities to grow.

Medieval cities were quite different from those familiar to us today. Beneath towering cathedrals, the narrow and winding streets of London, Brussels, and Florence teemed with merchants, artisans, priests, peddlers, jugglers, nobles, and servants. Occupational groups such as bakers, carpenters, and metalworkers clustered together in distinct sections or "quarters." Ethnicity also defined communities as residents tried to keep out people who differed from themselves. The term "ghetto" (from the Italian *borghetto*, meaning "outside the city walls") was first used to describe the neighborhood in which the Jews of Venice were segregated.

### Industrial European Cities

As the Middle Ages came to a close, steadily increasing commerce enriched a new urban middle class, or *bourgeoisie* (French, meaning "townspeople"). With more and more money, the bourgeoisie soon rivaled the hereditary aristocracy.

By about 1750, the Industrial Revolution triggered a *second urban revolution*, first in Europe and then in North America. Factories unleashed tremendous productive power, causing cities to grow bigger than ever before. London, the largest European city, reached 550,000 people by 1700 and exploded to 6.5 million by 1900 (A. F. Weber, 1963, orig. 1899; Chandler & Fox, 1974).

Cities not only grew but changed shape as well. Older winding streets gave way to broad, straight boulevards to handle the increasing flow of commercial traffic. Steam and electric trolleys soon crisscrossed the expanding cities. Because land was now a commodity to be bought and sold, developers divided cities into regular-sized lots (Mumford, 1961). The center of the city was no longer the cathedral but a bustling central business district filled with banks, retail stores, and tall office buildings.

With a new focus on business, cities became more crowded and impersonal. Crime rates rose. Especially at the outset, a few industrialists lived in grand style, but most men, women, and children barely survived by working in factories.

Organized efforts by workers to improve their lives eventually brought changes to the workplace, better housing, and the right to vote. Public services such as water, sewer systems, and electricity further improved urban living. Today, some urbanites still live in poverty, but a rising standard of living has partly fulfilled the city's historical promise of a better life.

## The Growth of U.S. Cities

Most of the Native Americans who inhabited North America for thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans were migratory people who formed few permanent settlements. The spread of villages and towns came after European colonization.



## Colonial Settlement, 1565–1800

In 1565, the Spanish built a settlement at Saint Augustine, Florida, and in 1607, the English founded Jamestown, Virginia. The first lasting settlement came in 1624, when the Dutch established New Amsterdam, later renamed New York.

New York and Boston (founded by the English in 1630) started out as tiny villages in a vast wilderness. They resembled medieval towns in Europe, with narrow, winding streets that still curve through lower Manhattan and downtown Boston. When the first census was completed in 1790, as Table 22–1 on page 522 shows, just 5 percent of the nation’s people lived in cities.

## Urban Expansion, 1800–1860

Early in the nineteenth century, as cities along the East Coast grew bigger, towns sprang up along the transportation routes that opened the American West. By 1860, Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, and Chicago were changing the face of the Midwest, and about one-fifth of the U.S. population lived in cities.

Urban expansion was greatest in the northern states; New York City, for example, had ten times the population of Charleston, South Carolina. The division of the United States into the industrial-urban North and the agrarian-rural South was one major cause of the Civil War (Schlesinger, 1969).

## The Metropolitan Era, 1860–1950

The Civil War (1861–65) gave an enormous boost to urbanization as factories strained to produce weapons. Waves of people deserted the countryside for cities in hopes of finding better jobs. Joining them were tens of millions of immigrants, mostly from Europe, forming a culturally diverse urban mix.

In 1900, New York’s population soared past the 4 million mark, and Chicago, a city of only 100,000 people in 1860, was closing in on 2 million. Such growth marked the era of the **metropolis** (from the Greek, meaning “mother city”), *a large city that socially and economically dominates an urban area*. Metropolises became the economic centers of the United States. By 1920, urban areas were home to a majority of the U.S. population.

Industrial technology pushed the urban skyline ever higher. In the 1880s, steel girders and mechanical elevators allowed buildings to rise more than ten stories high. In 1930, New York’s Empire State Building was hailed as an urban wonder, reaching 102 stories into the clouds.

## Urban Decentralization, 1950–Present

The industrial metropolis reached its peak about 1950. Since then, something of a turnaround—termed *urban decentralization*—has occurred as people have left downtown areas for outlying **suburbs**, *urban areas beyond the political boundaries of a city*. The old industrial cities of the Northeast and Midwest stopped growing, and some lost considerable population in the decades after 1950. At the same time, suburban populations increased rapidly. The urban landscape of densely packed central cities evolved into sprawling suburban regions.

## Suburbs and Urban Decline

Imitating the European aristocracy, some of the rich had town houses in the city as well as large country homes beyond the city limits. But



In recent decades, many U.S. cities in the Sunbelt have spread outward in a process called urban sprawl. Los Angeles, for example, now covers about 500 square miles, and even with a vast system of freeways, people moving around the city often find themselves stuck in slow-moving traffic. What are other disadvantages of urban sprawl?

not until after World War II did ordinary people find a suburban home within their reach. With more and more cars in circulation, new four-lane highways, government-backed mortgages, and inexpensive tract homes, the suburbs grew rapidly. By 1999, most of the U.S. population lived in the suburbs and shopped at nearby malls rather than in the older and more distant downtown shopping districts (Pederson, Smith, & Adler, 1999; Macionis & Parrillo, 2010).

As many older cities of the Snowbelt—the Northeast and Midwest—lost higher-income taxpayers to the suburbs, they struggled to pay for expensive social programs for the poor who remained. Many cities fell into financial crisis, and urban decay became severe. Soon the inner city came to be synonymous with slums, crime, drugs, unemployment, poverty, and minorities.

The urban critic Paul Goldberger (2002) points out that the decline of central cities has also led to a decline in the importance of public space. Historically, the heart of city life was played out on the streets. The French word for a sophisticated person is *boulevardier*, which literally means “street person”—a term that has a negative meaning in the United States today. The active life that once took place on public streets and in public squares now takes place in shopping malls, the lobbies of cineplex theaters, and gated residential communities—all privately owned spaces. Further reducing the vitality of today’s urban places is the spread of television, the Internet, and other media that people use without leaving home.

## Postindustrial Sunbelt Cities

As older Snowbelt cities fell into decline, Sunbelt cities in the South and the West began to grow rapidly. The soaring populations of cities such as Los Angeles and Houston reflect a population shift to the Sunbelt, where 60 percent of U.S. people now live. In addition, most of today’s immigrants enter the country in the Sunbelt region. In 1950, nine of the ten biggest U.S. cities were in the Snowbelt; today, seven of the top ten are in the Sunbelt (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

**TABLE 22-1** Urban Population of the United States, 1790–2040

Year	Population (in millions)	Percentage Living in Cities
1790	3.9	5.1%
1800	5.3	6.1
1820	9.6	7.3
1840	17.1	10.5
1860	31.4	19.7
1880	50.2	28.1
1900	76.0	39.7
1920	105.7	51.3
1940	131.7	56.5
1960	179.3	69.9
1980	226.5	73.7
2000	281.4	79.0
2020 (projected)	290.7	84.9
2040 (projected)	342.6	88.8

Sources: United Nations (2009) and U.S. Census Bureau (2010).

Unlike their colder counterparts, Sunbelt cities came of age after urban decentralization began. So although cities like Chicago have long been enclosed by a ring of politically independent suburbs, cities like Houston have pushed their boundaries outward to include suburban communities. Chicago covers 227 square miles; Houston is more than twice that size, and the greater Houston urban area covers almost 9,000 square miles—an area the size of the state of New Hampshire.

The great sprawl of Sunbelt cities has drawbacks. Many people in cities such as Atlanta, Dallas, Phoenix, and Los Angeles complain that unplanned growth results in traffic-clogged roads, poorly planned housing developments, and schools that cannot keep up with the inflow of children. Not surprisingly, voters in many communities across the United States have passed ballot initiatives seeking to limit urban sprawl (Lacayo, 1999; Romero & Liserio, 2002; W. Sullivan, 2007).

## Megalopolis: The Regional City

Another result of urban decentralization is urban regions or regional cities. The U.S. Census Bureau (2010) recognizes 374 *metropolitan statistical areas* (MSAs). Each includes at least one city with 50,000 or more people. The bureau also recognizes 579 *micropolitan statistical areas*, urban areas with at least one city of 10,000 to 50,000 people. *Core-based statistical areas* (CBSAs) include both metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas.

The biggest CBSAs contain millions of people and cover large areas that extend into several states. In 2009, the largest CBSA was New York and its adjacent urban areas in Long Island, western Connecticut, northern New Jersey, and eastern Pennsylvania, with a total population of more than 22 million. Next in size is the CBSA in southern California that includes Los Angeles, Riverside, and Long Beach, with a population of almost 18 million.

<b>metropolis</b> a large city that socially and economically dominates an urban area	<b>suburbs</b> urban areas beyond the political boundaries of a city	<b>megalopolis</b> a vast urban region containing a number of cities and their surrounding suburbs
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As regional cities grow, they begin to overlap. In the early 1960s, the French geographer Jean Gottmann (1961) coined the term **megalopolis** to designate a vast urban region containing a number of cities and their surrounding suburbs. Along the East Coast, a 400-mile megalopolis stretches all the way from New England to Virginia. Other supercities cover the eastern coast of Florida and stretch from Cleveland west to Chicago.

## Edge Cities

Urban decentralization has also created *edge cities*, business centers some distance from the old downtowns. Edge cities—a mix of corporate office buildings, shopping malls, hotels, and entertainment complexes—differ from suburbs, which contain mostly homes. The population of suburbs peaks at night, but the population of edge cities peaks during the workday.

As part of expanding urban regions, most edge cities have no clear physical boundaries. Some do have names, including Las Colinas (near the Dallas–Fort Worth airport), Tyson’s Corner (in Virginia, near Washington, D.C.), and King of Prussia (northwest of Philadelphia). Other edge cities are known only by the major highways that flow through them, including Route 1 in Princeton, New Jersey, and Route 128 near Boston (Garreau, 1991; Macionis & Parrillo, 2010).

## The Rural Rebound

The 2010 census showed that 83.7 percent of the country’s 309 million people were living in urban places. Over the course of U.S. history, as shown in Table 22–1, the urban population of the nation has increased steadily. Immigration has played a part in this increase because most newcomers settle in cities. At the same time, there has been considerable migration from rural areas to urban places, typically by people seeking greater social, educational, and economic opportunity.

However, between 2000 and 2010, two-thirds of the rural counties across the United States gained population, a trend analysts have called the “rural rebound.” Most of this gain resulted from the migration of people from urban areas. This trend has not affected all rural places: Many small towns in rural areas (especially in the Plains States) are struggling to stay alive. But even there, losses slowed during the 1990s.

The greatest gains have come to rural communities that offer scenic and recreational attractions, such as lakes, mountains, and ski areas. People are drawn to rural communities not only by their natural beauty but also by their slower pace of life: less traffic, less crime, and cleaner air. A number of companies have relocated to rural counties, which has increased economic opportunity for the rural population (K. M. Johnson, 1999; Johnson & Fuguitt, 2000; D. Johnson, 2001).

## Urbanism as a Way of Life

### Analyze

Early sociologists in Europe and the United States focused their attention on the rise of cities and how urban life differed from rural life. We briefly examine their accounts of urbanism as a way of life.

## Ferdinand Tönnies: *Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft*

In the late nineteenth century, the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1937) studied how life in the new industrial metropolis dif-



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**Gemeinschaft** a type of social organization in which people are closely tied by kinship and tradition

**Gesellschaft** a type of social organization in which people come together only on the basis of individual self-interest

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ferred from life in rural villages. From this contrast, he developed two concepts that have become a lasting part of sociology's terminology.

Tönnies (1963, orig. 1887) used the German word **Gemeinschaft** ("community") to refer to a type of social organization in which people are closely tied by kinship and tradition. The *Gemeinschaft* of the rural village joins people in what amounts to a single primary group.

By and large, argued Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft* is absent in the modern city. On the contrary, urbanization creates **Gesellschaft** ("association"), a type of social organization in which people come together only on the basis of individual self-interest. In the *Gesellschaft* way of life, individuals are motivated by their own needs rather than by a desire to help improve the well-being of everyone. By and large, city dwellers have little sense of community or common identity and look to others mainly when they need something. Tönnies saw in urbanization a weakening of close, long-lasting social relations in favor of the brief and impersonal ties or secondary relationships typical of business.

## Emile Durkheim: Mechanical and Organic Solidarity

The French sociologist Emile Durkheim (see Chapter 4, "Society") agreed with much of Tönnies's thinking about cities. However, Durkheim countered that urbanites do not lack social bonds; they simply organize social life differently than rural people.

Durkheim described traditional, rural life as *mechanical solidarity*, social bonds based on common sentiments and shared moral values. With its emphasis on tradition, Durkheim's concept of mechanical solidarity bears a striking similarity to Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft*. Urbanization erodes mechanical solidarity, Durkheim explained, but it also generates a new type of bonding, which he called *organic solidarity*, social bonds based on specialization and interdependence. This concept, which parallels Tönnies's *Gesellschaft*, reveals an important difference between the two thinkers. Both thought the growth of industrial cities weakened tradition, but Durkheim optimistically pointed to a new kind of solidarity. Where societies had been built on *likeness* (mechanical solidarity), Durkheim now saw social life based on *difference* (organic solidarity).

For Durkheim, urban society offered more individual choice, moral tolerance, and personal privacy than people find in rural villages. In sum, Durkheim thought that something is lost in the process of urbanization, but much is gained.

## Georg Simmel: The Blasé Urbanite

The German sociologist Georg Simmel (1858–1918) offered a microanalysis of cities, studying how urban life shapes the everyday experience of individuals. According to Simmel, individuals perceive the city as a crush of people, objects, and events. To prevent being overwhelmed by all this stimulation, urbanites develop a *blasé attitude*, tuning out much of what goes on around them. Such detachment does not mean that city dwellers lack compassion for



The rural rebound has been most pronounced in towns that offer spectacular natural beauty. There are times when people living in the scenic town of Park City, Utah, cannot even find a parking space.

others; they simply keep their distance as a survival strategy so that they can focus their time and energy on the people and things that really matter to them.

## The Chicago School: Robert Park and Louis Wirth

Sociologists in the United States soon joined the study of rapidly growing cities. Robert Park, a leader of the first U.S. sociology program at the University of Chicago, sought to add a street-level perspective by getting out and studying real cities. As he said of himself, "I suspect that I have actually covered more ground, tramping about in cities in different parts of the world, than any other living man" (1950:viii). Walking the streets, Park found the city to be an organized mosaic of distinctive ethnic communities, commercial centers, and industrial districts. Over time, he observed, these "natural areas" develop and change in relation to one another. To Park, the city was a living organism—a human kaleidoscope.



*Peasant Dance* (left, c. 1565), by Pieter Breughel the Elder, conveys the essential unity of rural life forged by generations of kinship and neighborhood. By contrast, Lily Furedi's *Subway* (right) communicates the impersonality common to urban areas. Taken together, these paintings capture Tönnies's distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*.

Pieter Breughel the Elder (c. 1525/30–1569), *Peasant Dance*, c. 1565, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna/Superstock. Lily Furedi, American. *Subway*. Oil on canvas, 99 × 123 cm. National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C./Smithsonian Institute.

Another major figure in the Chicago School of urban sociology was Louis Wirth (1897–1952). Wirth (1938) is best known for blending the ideas of Tönnies, Durkheim, Simmel, and Park into a comprehensive theory of urban life.

Wirth began by defining the city as a setting with a large, dense, and socially diverse population. These traits result in an impersonal, superficial, and transitory way of life. Living among millions of others, urbanites come into contact with many more people than residents of rural areas. So when city people notice others at all, they usually know them not in terms of *who they are* but *what they do*—as, for instance, the bus driver, the florist, or the grocery store clerk. Specialized urban relationships are pleasant for all concerned, but self-interest rather than friendship is usually the main reason behind the interaction.

The impersonal nature of urban relationships, together with the great social diversity found in cities today, makes city dwellers more tolerant than rural villagers. Rural communities often jealously enforce their narrow traditions, but the heterogeneous population of a city rarely shares any single code of moral conduct (T. C. Wilson, 1985, 1995).

**Evaluate** In both Europe and the United States, early sociologists presented a mixed view of urban living. Rapid urbanization troubled Tönnies, and Wirth saw personal ties and traditional morality lost in the anonymous rush of the city. Durkheim and Park emphasized urbanism's positive face, pointing to more personal freedom and greater personal choice.

One problem with all these views is that they paint urbanism in broad strokes that overlook the effects of class, race, and gender. There are many kinds of urbanites—rich and poor, black and white, Anglo and Latino, women and men—all leading distinctive lives (Gans, 1968). As the Thinking About Diversity box explains, the share of minorities in the largest U.S. cities increased sharply during the 1990s. We see social diversity most clearly in cities where various

categories of people are large enough to form distinct, visible communities (Maconis & Parrillo, 2010).

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** Of these urban sociologists—Tönnies, Durkheim, Park, and Wirth—which were more positive about urban life? Which were more negative? In each case, explain why.

## Urban Ecology

Sociologists (especially members of the Chicago School) developed **urban ecology**, the study of the link between the physical and social dimensions of cities. One issue of interest to urban ecologists is why cities are located where they are. Broadly speaking, the first cities emerged in fertile regions where the ecology favored raising crops. In addition, preindustrial people were concerned with defense, so they built their cities on mountains (ancient Athens was perched on an outcropping of rock) or surrounded by water (Paris and Mexico City were founded on islands). With the coming of the Industrial Revolution, economic considerations gained importance, which explains why all the major U.S. cities were situated near rivers or natural harbors that facilitated trade.

Urban ecologists also study the physical design of cities. In 1925, Ernest W. Burgess, a student and colleague of Robert Park, described land use in Chicago in terms of *concentric zones*. City centers, Burgess observed, are business districts bordered by a ring of factories, followed by residential rings with housing that becomes more expensive the farther it is from the noise and pollution of the city's center.

Homer Hoyt (1939) refined Burgess's observations, noting that distinctive districts sometimes form *wedge-shaped sectors*. For example, one fashionable area may develop next to another, or an industrial district may extend outward from a city's center along a train or trolley line.

Chauncy Harris and Edward Ullman (1945) added yet another insight: As cities decentralize, they lose their single-center form in



## Thinking About Diversity: Race, Class, and Gender

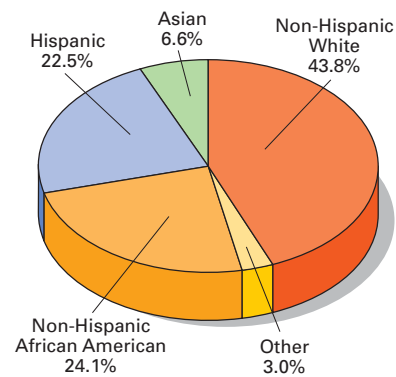


## Minorities Have Become a Majority in the Largest U.S. Cities

According to the latest data from the Census Bureau, minorities—Hispanics, African Americans, and Asians—are now a majority of the population in about half of the 100 largest U.S. cities, up from one-third in 1990.

What accounts for the change? One reason is that large cities have been losing their non-Hispanic white population. By 2000, Santa Ana, California, for example, lost 38 percent of its 1990 white population; the drop was 40 percent in Birmingham, Alabama, and a whopping 53 percent in Detroit, Michigan. The white share of the population of all 100 of the largest cities fell from 52.1 percent in 1990 to 43.8 percent in 2000, as the figure shows.

But an even bigger reason for the minority-majority trend is the increase in immigration. Immigration, coupled with higher birth rates among new immigrants, resulted in a 43 percent gain in the Hispanic population (almost 4 million people) of the largest 100 cities between 1990 and 2000. The Asian population



**Population Profile for the 100  
Largest U.S. Cities, 2000**

Racial and ethnic minorities make up a majority of the population of this country's 100 largest cities.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2001).

also surged by 40 percent (more than 1.1 million people). The African American population was steady over the course of the 1990s. Political officials and other policymakers have been watching these figures closely, for the future vitality of the largest U.S. cities depends on meeting the needs and welcoming the contributions of the swelling minority populations.

### What Do You Think?

1. Why are the minority populations of large U.S. cities increasing?
2. What positive changes and what challenges does a minority majority bring to a city?
3. Before Hurricane Katrina (2005), African Americans represented 60 percent of the population of New Orleans; afterward, the share was about 40 percent. What difference might this change make in the city's immediate future?

Sources: Schmitt (2001) and U.S. Census Bureau (2010).

favor of a *multicentered model*. As cities grow, residential areas, industrial parks, and shopping districts typically push away from one another. Few people wish to live close to industrial areas, for example, so the city becomes a mosaic of distinct districts.

*Social area analysis* investigates what people in particular neighborhoods have in common. Three factors seem to explain most of the variation: family patterns, social class, and race and ethnicity (Shevky & Bell, 1955; Johnston, 1976). Families with children look for areas with single-family homes or large apartments and good schools. The rich seek high-prestige neighborhoods, often in the central city near cultural attractions. People with a common race or ethnic heritage tend to cluster in distinctive communities.

Brian Berry and Philip Rees (1969) tie together many of these insights. They explain that distinct family types tend to settle in the concentric zones described by Burgess. Specifically, households with many children tend to live in the outer areas of a city, while “young singles” cluster toward the city’s center. Social class differences are primarily responsible for the sector-shaped districts described by Hoyt—for instance, the rich occupy one “side of the tracks” and the poor the other. And racial and ethnic neighborhoods are found at various points throughout the city, consistent with Harris and Ullman’s multicentered model.


## Urban Political Economy

In the late 1960s, many large U.S. cities were rocked by riots. In the wake of this unrest, some analysts turned away from the ecological approach to a social-conflict understanding of city life. The *urban*

*political economy* model applies Karl Marx’s analysis of conflict in the workplace to conflict in the city (Lindstrom, 1995).

Political economists reject the ecological approach’s view of the city as a natural organism with particular districts and neighborhoods developing according to an internal logic. They claim that city life is defined by larger institutional structures, especially the economy. Capitalism, which transforms the city into real estate traded for profit and concentrates wealth and power in the hands of the few, is the key to understanding city life. From this point of view, for example, the decline in industrial Snowbelt cities after 1950 was the result of deliberate decisions by the corporate elite to move their production facilities to the Sunbelt (where labor is cheaper and less likely to be unionized) or to move them out of the country entirely to low-income nations (Molotch, 1976; Castells, 1977, 1983; Lefebvre, 1991; Jones & Wilson, 1999).

**Evaluate** The fact that many U.S. cities are in crisis, with widespread poverty, high crime, and barely functioning schools, seems to favor the political economy model over the urban ecology approach. But one criticism applies to both: They focus on U.S. cities during a limited period of history. Much of what we know about industrial cities does not apply to preindustrial U.S. towns in our own past or to the rapidly growing cities in many poor nations today. It is unlikely that any single model of cities can account for the full range of urban diversity.

 **Read** “Life and Death in the City: Neighborhoods in Context” by John Logan on [mysoclab.com](https://mysoclab.com)



The Industrial Revolution created great cities across the United States. In recent decades, however, the movement of industry abroad has brought decline to Detroit and other older cities in the “Rustbelt.” From this abandoned warehouse, we see the headquarters of General Motors, which, in 2009, declared bankruptcy. What do you see as the future of such cities?

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** In your own words, explain what the urban ecology theory and the urban political economy theory teach us about cities.

## Urbanization in Poor Nations

### Understand

**November 16, Cairo, Egypt.** People call the vast Muslim cemetery in Old Cairo the “City of the Dead.” In truth, it is very much alive: Tens of thousands of squatters have moved into the mausoleums, making this place an eerie mix of life and death. Children run across the stone floors, clotheslines stretch between the monuments, and an occasional television antenna protrudes from a tomb roof. With Cairo’s population increasing at the rate of 1,000 people a day, families live where they can.

As noted earlier, twice in its history, the world has experienced a revolutionary expansion of cities. The first urban revolution began about 8000 B.C.E. with the first urban settlements and continued until permanent settlements were in place on several continents. About 1750, the second urban revolution took off; it lasted for two centuries as the Industrial Revolution spurred rapid growth of cities in Europe and North America.

A third urban revolution is now under way. Today, approximately 75 percent of people in industrial societies are already city dwellers. But extreme urban growth is occurring in low-income nations. In 1950, about 25 percent of the people in poor countries lived in cities. In 2008, the world became mostly urban for the first time in history with more than half of humanity living in cities (Population Reference Bureau, 2010).

Not only are more of the world’s people urban; more and more cities are passing the 10 million mark. In 1975, only three cities in the world, Tokyo, New York, and Mexico City, had populations exceeding

10 million, and all these cities were in high-income nations. In 2010, twenty-one cities had passed this mark, and only five of them were in high-income nations. By 2025, eight more “megacities” will be added to the list and none of these eight will be in a high-income nation (five will be in Asia, two in Latin American, and one in Africa) (Brockhoff, 2000; United Nations, 2010).

This third urban revolution is taking place in the developing world because many poor nations have entered the high-growth Stage 2 of the demographic transition. Falling death rates have fueled population increases in Latin America, Asia, and especially Africa. For urban areas, the rate of increase is *twice* as high because in addition to natural increase, millions of people leave the countryside each year in search of jobs, health care, education, and conveniences such as running water and electricity.

Cities do offer more opportunities than rural areas, but they provide no quick fix for the massive problems of escalating population and grinding poverty. Many cities in less economically developed nations—including Mexico City, Egypt’s Cairo, India’s Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), and Manila in the Philippines—are simply unable to meet the basic needs of much of their populations. All these cities are surrounded by wretched shantytowns—settlements of makeshift homes built from discarded materials. As noted in Chapter 12 (“Global Stratification”), even city dumps are home to thousands of poor people, who pick through the piles of waste hoping to find enough to eat or sell to make it through another day.

## Environment and Society

### Analyze

The human species has prospered, rapidly expanding over the entire planet. An increasing share of the global population now lives in cities, complex settlements that offer the promise of a better life than that found in rural villages.

But these advances have come at a high price. Never before in history have human beings placed such demands on the planet. This disturbing development brings us to the final section of this chapter: the interplay between the natural environment and society. Like demography, **ecology** is another cousin of sociology, formally defined as *the study of the interaction of living organisms and the natural environment*. Ecology rests on the research of natural scientists as well as social scientists. This text focuses on the aspects of ecology that involve familiar sociological concepts and issues.

The **natural environment** is *Earth’s surface and atmosphere, including living organisms, air, water, soil, and other resources necessary to sustain life*. Like every other species, humans depend on the natural environment to survive. Yet with our capacity for culture, humans stand apart from other species; we alone take deliberate action to remake the world according to our own interests and desires, for better and for worse.

Why is the environment of interest to sociologists? Environmental problems, from pollution to acid rain to global warming, do not arise from the natural world operating on its own. Such problems result from the specific actions of human beings, which means they are *social* problems.



## The Global Dimension

The study of the natural environment requires a global perspective. The reason is simple: Regardless of political divisions among nations, the planet is a single **ecosystem**, *a system composed of the interaction of all living organisms and their natural environment*.

The Greek meaning of *eco* is “house,” reminding us that this planet is our home and that all living things and their natural environment are interrelated. A change in any part of the natural environment ripples throughout the entire global ecosystem.

Consider, from an ecological point of view, our national love of hamburgers. People in North America (and, increasingly, around the world) have created a huge demand for beef, which has greatly expanded the ranching industry in Brazil, Costa Rica, and other Latin American nations. To produce the lean meat sought by fast-food corporations, cattle in Latin America feed on grass, which uses a great deal of land. Latin American ranchers get the land for grazing by clearing thousands of square miles of forests each year. These tropical forests are vital to maintaining Earth’s atmosphere. Deforestation ends up threatening everyone, including people in the United States enjoying their hamburgers (N. Myers, 1984a).

## Technology and the Environmental Deficit

Sociologists point to a simple formula:  $I = PAT$ , where environmental impact ( $I$ ) reflects a society’s population ( $P$ ), its level of affluence ( $A$ ), and its level of technology ( $T$ ). Members of societies with simple technology—the hunters and gatherers described in Chapter 4 (“Society”)—hardly affect the environment because they are few in number, are poor, and have only simple technology. On the contrary, nature affects their lives as they follow the migration of game, watch the rhythm of the seasons, and suffer from natural catastrophes such as fires, floods, droughts, and storms.

Societies at intermediate stages of technological development, being both larger and richer, have a somewhat greater capacity to affect the environment. But the environmental impact of horticulture (small-scale farming), pastoralism (the herding of animals), and even agriculture (the use of animal-drawn plows) is limited because people still rely on muscle power for producing food and other goods.

Humans’ ability to control the natural environment increased dramatically with the Industrial Revolution. Muscle power gave way to engines that burn fossil fuels: coal at first and then oil. Such machinery affects the environment

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The environmental movement has gained the support of a number of well-known and influential people. Former president Bill Clinton recently thanked actor Matt Damon for his help in the effort to provide clean water to people around the world. Are you involved in any efforts to protect the natural environment?



in two ways: We consume more natural resources, and we release more pollutants into the atmosphere. Even more important, armed with industrial technology, we are able to bend nature to our will, tunneling through mountains, damming rivers, irrigating deserts, and drilling for oil in the arctic wilderness and on the ocean floor. This explains why people in rich nations, who represent just 23 percent of humanity, account for half of the world’s energy use (World Bank, 2011).

Not only do high-income societies use more energy, but also they produce 100 times more goods than people in agrarian societies do. Higher living standards in turn increase the problem of solid waste (because people ultimately throw away most of what they produce) and pollution (industrial production generates smoke and other toxic substances).

From the start, people recognized the material benefits of industrial technology. But only a century later did they begin to see the long-term effects on the natural environment. Today, we realize that the technological power to make our lives better can also put the lives of future generations at risk.

Evidence is mounting that we are running up an **environmental deficit**, *profound long-term harm to the natural environment caused by humanity’s focus on short-term material affluence* (Bormann, 1990). The concept of environmental deficit is important for three reasons. First, it reminds us that environmental concerns are *sociological*, reflecting societies’ priorities about how people should live. Second, it suggests that much environmental damage—to the air, land, and water—is *unintended*. By focusing on the short-term benefits of, say, cutting down forests, strip mining, or using throwaway packaging, we fail to see their long-term environmental effects. Third, in some respects, the environmental deficit is *reversible*. Societies have created environmental problems but can also undo many of them.

## Culture: Growth and Limits

Whether we recognize environmental dangers and decide to do something about them is a cultural matter. Thus along with technology, culture has powerful environmental consequences.

### The Logic of Growth

When you turn on the television news, you might hear a story like this: “The government reported bad economic news today, with the economy growing by only half a percent during the first quarter of the year.” If you stop to think about it, our culture defines an economy that isn’t growing as “stagnant” (which is bad) and an economy that is getting smaller as a “recession” or a “depression” (which is *very* bad). What is “good” is *growth*—the economy getting bigger and bigger. More cars, bigger homes, more income, more spending—the idea of *more* is at the heart of our cultural definition of living well (McKibben, 2007).

One of the reasons we define growth in positive terms is that we value *material comfort*, believing that money and the things it buys

improve our lives. We also believe in the idea of *progress*, thinking the future will be better than the present. In addition, we look to *science* to make our lives easier and more rewarding. In simple terms, “having things is good,” “life gets better,” and “people are clever.” Taken together, such cultural values form the *logic of growth*.

An optimistic view of the world, the logic of growth holds that more powerful technology has improved our lives and new discoveries will continue to do so in the future. Throughout the history of the United States and other high-income nations, the logic of growth has been the driving force behind settling the wilderness, building towns and roads, and pursuing material affluence.

However, “progress” can lead to unexpected problems, including strain on the environment. The logic of growth responds by arguing that people (especially scientists and other technology experts) will find a way out of any problem that growth places in our path. For example, before the world runs short of oil, we will come up with hydrogen, solar, or nuclear engines or some other as yet unknown technology to meet the world’s energy needs.

Environmentalists counter that the logic of growth is flawed because it assumes that natural resources such as oil, clean air, fresh water, and topsoil will always be plentiful. We can and will exhaust these *finite* resources if we continue to pursue growth at any cost. Echoing Malthus, environmentalists warn that if we call on Earth to support increasing numbers of people, we will surely deplete finite resources, destroying the environment—and ourselves—in the process.



The most important insight sociology offers about our physical world is that environmental problems do not simply “happen.” Rather, the state of the natural environment reflects the ways in which social life is organized—how people live and what they think is important. The greater the technological power of a society, the greater that society’s ability to threaten the natural environment.

## The Limits to Growth

If we cannot invent our way out of the problems created by the logic of growth, perhaps we need another way of thinking about the world. Environmentalists therefore counter that growth must have limits. Stated simply, the *limits-to-growth thesis* is that humanity must put in place policies to control the growth of population, production, and use of resources in order to avoid environmental collapse.

In *The Limits to Growth*, a controversial book that was influential in launching the environmental movement, Donella Meadows and her colleagues (1972) used a computer model to calculate the planet’s available resources, rates of population growth, amount of land available for cultivation, levels of industrial and food production, and amount of pollutants released into the atmosphere. The authors concede that any long-range predictions are speculative, and some critics think they are plain wrong (Simon, 1981). But right or wrong, the conclusions of the study call for serious consideration. First, the authors claim that we are quickly consuming Earth’s finite resources. Supplies of oil, natural gas, and other energy sources are declining and will continue to drop, a little faster or slower depending on the conservation policies of rich nations and the speed with which other nations such as India and China continue to industrialize. Within the next 100 years, resources will run out, crippling industrial output and causing a decline in food production.

This limits-to-growth theory shares Malthus’s pessimism about the future. People who accept it doubt that current patterns of life are sustainable for even another century. Perhaps we all can learn to live with less. This may not be as hard as you might think: Research shows, for example, that an increase in material consumption in recent decades has not brought an increase in levels of personal happiness (D. G. Myers, 2000). In the end, environmentalists warn, either make fundamental changes in how we live, placing less strain on the natural environment, or widespread hunger and conflict will force change on us.

## Solid Waste: The Disposable Society

Across the United States, people generate a massive amount of solid waste—about 1.3 billion pounds *every day*. Figure 22–4 shows the average composition of a typical community’s trash.

As a rich nation of people who value convenience, the United States has become a *disposable society*. We consume more products than virtually any other nation, and many of these products have throwaway packaging. For example, fast food is served with cardboard, plastic, and Styrofoam containers that we throw away within minutes. Countless other products, from film to fishhooks, are elaborately packaged to make the products more attractive to the customer and to discourage tampering and theft.

Manufacturers market soft drinks, beer, and fruit juices in aluminum cans, glass jars, and plastic containers, which not only consume finite resources but also generate mountains of solid waste. Then there are countless items intentionally designed to be disposable: pens, razors, flashlights, batteries, even cameras. Other products, from light bulbs to automobiles, are designed to have a limited useful life and then become unwanted junk. As Paul Connett (1991) points out, even the words we use to describe what we throw away—*waste, litter, trash, refuse, garbage, rubbish*—show how little we value what we cannot immediately use. But this was not always the case, as the Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life box on page 530 explains.



Living in a rich society, the average person in the United States consumes about 500 times more energy, plastics, lumber, water, and other resources than someone living in a low-income country such as Bangladesh or Tanzania and nearly twice as much as people in some other high-income countries such as Sweden and Japan. This high level of consumption means not only that we in the United States use a disproportionate share of the planet's natural resources but also that we generate most of the world's refuse.

We like to say that we throw things “away.” But most of our solid waste never goes away. Rather, it ends up in landfills, which are, literally, filling up. Material in landfills can pollute underground water supplies. Although in most places, laws now regulate what can be discarded in a landfill, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (2011) has identified 1,290 dump sites across the United States containing hazardous materials that are polluting water both above and below the ground. In addition, what goes into landfills all too often stays there, sometimes for centuries. Tens of millions of tires, diapers, and other items we bury in landfills each year do not decompose but will remain as an unwelcome legacy for future generations.

Environmentalists argue that we should address the problem of solid waste by doing what many of our grandparents did: Use less and turn “waste” into a resource. Part of the solution is *recycling*, reusing resources we would otherwise discard. Recycling is an accepted practice in Japan and many other nations, and it is becoming more common in the United States, where we now reuse about one-third of waste materials (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2010). The share is increasing as laws require the recovery and reuse of certain materials such as glass bottles and aluminum cans and as the business of recycling becomes more profitable.

## Water and Air

Oceans, lakes, and streams are the lifeblood of the global ecosystem. Humans depend on water for drinking, bathing, cooking, cleaning, recreation, and a host of other activities.

According to what scientists call the *hydrologic cycle*, Earth naturally recycles water and refreshes the land. The process begins as heat from the sun causes Earth's water, 97 percent of which is in the oceans, to evaporate and form clouds. Because water evaporates at lower temperatures than most pollutants, the water vapor that rises from the seas is relatively pure, leaving various contaminants behind. Water then falls to the Earth as rain, which drains into streams and rivers and finally returns to the sea. Two major concerns about water, then, are supply and pollution.

### Water Supply

Less than one-tenth of 1 percent of Earth's water is suitable for drinking. It is not surprising, then, that for thousands of years, water rights have figured prominently in laws around the world. Today, some regions of the world, especially the tropics, enjoy plentiful fresh water, using a small share of the available supply. However, high demand, coupled with modest reserves, makes water supply a matter of concern in much of North America and Asia, where people look to rivers rather than rainfall for their water. In China, aquifers are dropping rapidly. In the Middle East, water supply is reaching a critical level. Iran is rationing water in its capital city. In Egypt, the Nile River provides just one-sixth as much water per person as it did in 1900. Across northern Africa and the Middle East, as many as 1 billion people may

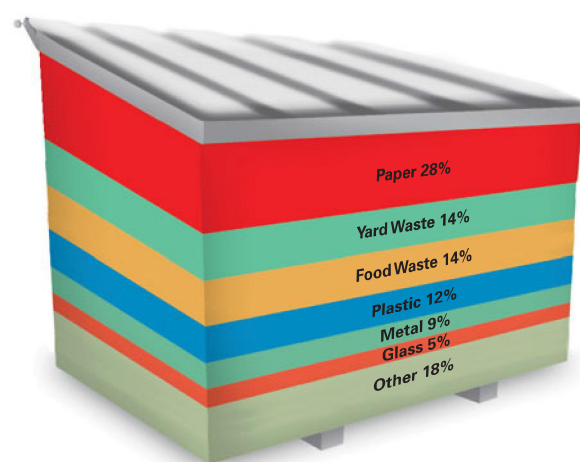


FIGURE 22–4 Composition of Community Trash

We throw away a wide range of material, with paper the single largest part of our trash.

Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (2010).

lack the water they need for irrigation and drinking by 2030. From another angle, by this time the world will be able to provide 40 percent less water than the planet requires (United Nations Environmental Programme, 2008; Walsh, 2009).

Rising population and the development of more complex technology have greatly increased the world's appetite for water. The global consumption of water (now estimated at almost 4,000 cubic kilometers, or 141 trillion cubic feet per year) has doubled since 1950 and is rising steadily. As a result, even in parts of the world that receive plenty of rainfall, people are using groundwater faster than it can be replenished naturally. In the Tamil Nadu region of southern India, for example, so much groundwater is being used that the water table has fallen 100 feet over the last several decades. Mexico City—which has sprawled to some 1,400 square miles—has pumped so much water from its underground aquifer that the city has sunk 30 feet during the past century and continues to drop about 2 inches per year. Farther north in the United States, the Ogallala aquifer, which lies below seven states from South Dakota to Texas, is now being pumped so rapidly that some experts fear it could run dry in just a few decades.

In light of such developments, we must face the reality that water is a valuable and finite resource. Greater conservation of water by individuals—the average person in the United States consumes about 100 gallons of water a day, which amounts to about 3 million gallons over a lifetime—is part of the answer. However, households around the world account for just 10 percent of water use. It is even more crucial that we curb water consumption by industry, which uses 20 percent of the global total, and farming, which consumes 70 percent of the total for irrigation.

Perhaps new irrigation technology will reduce the future demand for water. But here again, we see how population increase, as well as economic growth, strains our ecosystem (United Nations World Water Assessment Programme, 2009; U.S. Geological Survey, 2009; Solomon, 2010).

### Water Pollution

In large cities from Mexico City to Cairo to Shanghai, many people have no choice but to drink contaminated water. Infectious diseases such as



## Why Grandma Macionis Had No Trash

Grandma Macionis, we always used to say, never threw anything away. Not food, not bottles or cans, not paper. Not even coffee grounds. Nothing.

Grandma was born and raised in Lithuania—the “old country”—where life in a poor village shaped her in ways that never changed, even after she came to the United States as a young woman and settled in Philadelphia.

In her later years, when I knew her, I can remember the family traveling together to her house to celebrate her birthday. We never knew what to get Grandma, because she never seemed to need anything. She lived a simple life and had simple clothes and showed little interest in “fancy things.” She had no electric appliances. She used her simple tools until they wore out. Her kitchen knives, for example, were worn narrow from decades of sharpening. The food that was left over from meals was saved. What could not be saved was recycled as compost for her vegetable garden.

After opening a birthday present, she would carefully save the box, refold the wrapping paper, and roll up the ribbon—all of these things meant as much to her as whatever gift they contained.

We all knew her routines and we smiled together as we watched her put everything away, knowing she would find a way to use each item again and again.

As strange as Grandma sometimes seemed to her grandchildren, she was a product of her culture. A century ago, in fact, there was little “trash.” If socks wore thin, people mended them, probably more than once. When they were beyond repair,

they were used as rags for cleaning or sewn with bits of other old clothing into a quilt. Everything had value—if not in one way, then in another.

During the twentieth century, as women joined men in working outside the home, income went up. Families began buying more appliances and other “timesaving” products. Before long, few people cared about the kind of recycling that Grandma practiced. Soon cities sent crews from block to block to pick up truckloads of discarded material. The era of “trash” had begun.



Grandma Macionis, in the 1970s, with the author.

### What Do You Think?

1. Just as Grandma Macionis was a product of her culture, so are we. Do you know people who have plenty but never seem to think they have enough?
2. What cultural values make people today demand timesaving products and “convenience” packaging?
3. Do you think recent decades have brought a turnaround so that people are now more aware of a need to recycle? How does today’s recycling differ from that practiced by Grandma Macionis?

typhoid, cholera, and dysentery, all caused by waterborne microorganisms, spread rapidly through these populations. Besides ensuring ample supplies of water, then, we must also protect the *quality* of water.

Water quality in the United States is generally good by global standards. However, even here the problem of water pollution is steadily growing. Across the United States, rivers and streams absorb hundreds of millions of pounds of toxic waste each year. This pollution results not just from intentional dumping but also from the runoff of agricultural fertilizers and lawn chemicals.

A special problem is *acid rain*—precipitation made acidic by air pollution—which destroys plant and animal life. Acid rain begins with power plants burning fossil fuels (oil and coal) to generate electricity; this burning releases sulfuric and nitrous oxides into the air. As the wind sweeps these gases into the atmosphere, they react with the air to form sulfuric and nitric acids, which turns atmospheric moisture acidic.

This is a clear case of one type of pollution causing another: Air pollution (from smokestacks) ends up contaminating water (in lakes and streams that collect acid rain). Acid rain is truly a global phenomenon because the regions that suffer the harmful effects may be thousands of miles from the source of the original pollution. For instance, British power plants have caused acid rain that has devastated forests and fish in Norway and Sweden, up to 1,000 miles to the northeast. In the United States, we see a similar pattern as midwestern smokestacks have harmed the natural environment of upstate New York and New England.

### Air Pollution

Because we are surrounded by air, most people in the United States are more aware of air pollution than contaminated water. One of the unexpected consequences of industrial technology, especially the factory and the motor vehicle, has been a decline in air quality. In London in the mid-twentieth century, factory smokestacks, automobiles, and coal fires used to heat homes all added up to probably the worst urban air quality the world has ever known. The fog that some British jokingly called “pea soup” was in reality a deadly mix of pollutants: In 1952, an especially thick haze that hung over London for five days killed 4,000 people.

Air quality improved in the final decades of the twentieth century. Rich nations passed laws that banned high-pollution heating, including the coal fires that choked London. In addition, scientists devised ways to make factories and motor vehicles operate much more cleanly. In fact, today’s vehicles produce only a fraction of the pollution that spewed from models of the 1950s and 1960s. And cleaner air has improved human health: Experts estimate that improvement in U.S. air quality over the past several decades has added almost half a year to the average life span (Chang, 2009).

If high-income countries can breathe a bit more easily than they once did, the problem of air pollution in poor societies is becoming more serious. One reason is that people in low-income countries still rely on wood, coal, peat, and other “dirty” fuels to cook their food and heat their homes. In addition, nations eager to encourage short-



Water is vital to life, and it is also in short supply. The state of Gujarat, in western India, has experienced a long drought. In the village of Natwarghad, people crowd together, lowering pots into the local well, taking what little water is left.

term industrial development may pay little attention to the longer-term dangers of air pollution. As a result, many cities in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Asia are plagued by air pollution as bad as London's "pea soup" back in the 1950s.

## The Rain Forests

**Rain forests** are regions of dense forestation, most of which circle the globe close to the equator. The largest tropical rain forests are in South America (notably Brazil), west-central Africa, and Southeast Asia. In all, the world's rain forests cover some 1.5 billion acres, or 4.7 percent of Earth's total land surface.

Like other global resources, rain forests are falling victim to the needs and appetites of the surging world population. As noted earlier, to meet the demand for beef, ranchers in Latin America burn forested areas to increase their supply of grazing land. We are also losing rain forests to the hardwood trade. People in rich nations pay high prices for mahogany and other woods because, as the environmentalist Norman Myers (1984b:88) puts it, they have "a penchant for parquet floors, fine furniture, fancy paneling, weekend yachts, and high-grade coffins." Under such economic pressure, the world's rain forests are now just half their original size, and they continue to shrink by at least 1 percent (50,000 square miles) annually, which amounts to about an acre every second. Unless we stop this loss, the rain forests will vanish before the end of this century, and with them will go protection for Earth's biodiversity and climate (Rainforest Foundation, 2009; United Nations Development Programme, 2010).

## Global Warming

Why are rain forests so important? One reason is that they cleanse the atmosphere of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>). Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the amount of carbon dioxide produced by humans, mostly from factories and automobiles, has risen sharply. Much of this carbon dioxide is absorbed by the oceans. But plants also take in carbon dioxide and expel oxygen. This is why rain forests are vital to maintaining the chemical balance of the atmosphere.

The problem is that production of carbon dioxide is rising while the amount of plant life on Earth is shrinking. To make matters worse, rain forests are being destroyed mostly by burning, which releases even more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Experts estimate that the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide is now 40 percent higher than it was 150 years ago and rising rapidly (Gore, 2006; Adam, 2008; National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, 2011).

High above Earth, carbon dioxide acts like the glass roof of a greenhouse, letting heat from the sun pass through to the surface while preventing much of it from radiating away from the planet. The result of this *greenhouse effect*, say ecologists, is **global warming**, a rise in Earth's average temperature due to an increasing concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Over the past century, the global tempera-



ture has risen about 1.3° Fahrenheit (to an average of 58° F). Scientists warn that it could rise by 5° to 10° F during this century. Already, the polar ice caps are melting, and over the last century, the average level of the oceans has risen about six inches. Scientists predict that increasing average temperatures could melt so much ice that the sea level would rise enough to cover low-lying land all around the world: Water would cover all of the Maldivian Islands in the Indian Ocean, most of Bangladesh, and much of the coastal United States, including Washington, D.C., right up to the steps of the White House. Such a change would create perhaps 100 million "climate change refugees." On the other hand, this same process of rising temperatures will affect other regions of the world very differently. The U.S. Midwest, currently one of the most productive agricultural regions in the world, would likely become more arid (Gillis, 2011; McMahon, 2011; Reed, 2011).

Some scientists point out that we cannot be sure of the consequences of global warming. Others point to the fact that global temperature changes have been taking place throughout history, apparently having little or nothing to do with rain forests or human activity. A few are optimistic, suggesting that higher concentrations of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere might speed up plant growth (since plants thrive on this gas), and this increase would correct the imbalance and push Earth's temperature downward once again. But the consensus among scientists is now clear: Global warming is a serious problem that threatens the future of all of us (Kerr, 2005; Gore, 2006; International Panel on Climate Change, 2007; Singer, 2007).

## Declining Biodiversity

Our planet is home to as many as 30 million species of animals, plants, and microorganisms. As rain forests are cleared and humans extend their control over nature, several dozen unique species of plants and animals cease to exist each day, reducing the planet's *biodiversity*.

But given the vast number of living species, why should we be concerned by the loss of a few? Environmentalists give four reasons. First, our planet's biodiversity provides a varied source of human food. Using agricultural high technology, scientists can "splice" familiar crops with more exotic plant life, making food more bountiful as

well as more resistant to insects and disease. Certain species of life are even considered vital to the production of human food. Bees, for example, perform the work of pollination, a necessary stage in the growth of plants. The fact that the bee population has declined by one-third in the United States and by two-thirds in the Middle East is cause for serious concern. Thus sustaining biodiversity helps feed our planet's rapidly increasing population.

Second, Earth's biodiversity is a vital genetic resource used by medical and pharmaceutical researchers to produce hundreds of new compounds each year that cure disease and improve our lives. For example, children in the United States now have a good chance of surviving leukemia, a disease that was almost a sure killer two generations ago, because of a compound derived from a tropical flower called the rosy periwinkle. The oral birth control pill, used by tens of millions of women in this country, is another product of plant research involving the Mexican forest yam. Because biodiversity itself allows our ecosystem to control many types of diseases, it is likely that if biodiversity declines, the transmission of disease will increase.

Third, with the loss of any species of life—whether it is the magnificent California condor, the famed Chinese panda, the spotted owl, or even a single species of ant—the beauty and complexity of our natural environment are diminished. There are clear warning signs of such loss: Three-fourths of the world's 10,000 species of birds are declining in number.

Finally, unlike pollution, the extinction of any species is irreversible and final. An important ethical question, then, is whether we who live today have the right to impoverish the world for those who live tomorrow (E. O. Wilson, 1991; Keesing et al., 2010; Capella, 2011).

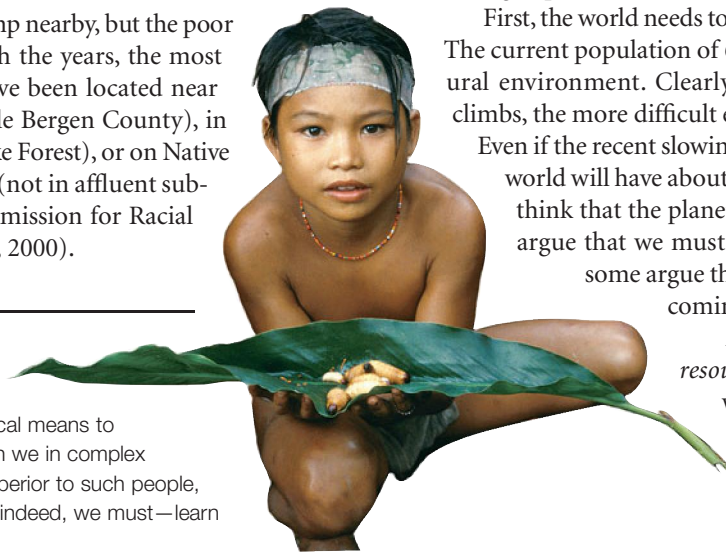
## Environmental Racism

Conflict theory has given rise to the concept of **environmental racism**, *patterns of development that expose poor people, especially minorities, to environmental hazards*. Historically, factories that spew pollution have stood near neighborhoods of the poor and people of color. Why? In part, the poor themselves were drawn to factories in search of work, and their low incomes often meant they could afford housing only in undesirable neighborhoods. Sometimes the only housing that fit their budgets stood in the very shadow of the plants and mills where they worked.

Nobody wants a factory or dump nearby, but the poor have little power to resist. Through the years, the most serious environmental hazards have been located near Newark, New Jersey (not in upscale Bergen County), in southside Chicago (not wealthy Lake Forest), or on Native American reservations in the West (not in affluent suburbs of Denver or Phoenix) (Commission for Racial Justice, 1994; Bohon & Humphrey, 2000).

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Members of small, simple societies, such as the Mentawi in Indonesia, live in harmony with nature; they do not have the technological means to greatly affect the natural world. Although we in complex societies like to think of ourselves as superior to such people, the truth is that there is much we can—indeed, we must—learn from them.



## Looking Ahead: Toward a Sustainable Society and World

### Evaluate

The demographic analysis presented in this chapter reveals some disturbing trends. We see, first, that Earth's population has reached record levels because birth rates remain high in poor nations and death rates have fallen just about everywhere. Reducing fertility will remain a pressing need throughout this century. Even with some recent decline in the rate of population increase, the nightmare Thomas Malthus described is still a real possibility, as the Sociology in Focus box explains.

Further, population growth remains greatest in the poorest countries of the world, which cannot meet the needs of their present populations, much less future ones. Supporting 83 million additional people on our planet each year, 81 million of them in economically less developed countries, will require a global commitment to provide not just food but housing, schools, and employment as well. The well-being of the entire world may ultimately depend on resolving the economic and social problems of poor, overly populated countries and bridging the widening gulf between “have” and “have-not” nations.

Urbanization is continuing, especially in poor countries. For thousands of years, people have sought out cities in the hope of finding a better life. But the sheer numbers of people who live in today's megacities—including Mexico City, São Paulo (Brazil), Lagos (Nigeria), Mumbai (India), and Manila (Philippines)—have created urban problems on a massive scale.

Around the world, humanity is facing a serious environmental challenge. Part of this problem is population increase, which is greatest in poor countries. But part of the problem is the high levels of consumption in rich nations such as our own. By increasing the planet's environmental deficit, our present way of life is borrowing against the well-being of our children and their children. Globally, members of rich societies, who currently consume so much of Earth's resources, are mortgaging the future security of the poor countries of the world.

The answer, in principle, is to create an **ecologically sustainable culture**, *a way of life that meets the needs of the present generation without threatening the environmental legacy of future generations*. Sustainable living depends on three strategies.

First, the world needs to *bring population growth under control*. The current population of 6.9 billion is already straining the natural environment. Clearly, the higher the world's population climbs, the more difficult environmental problems will become.

Even if the recent slowing of population growth continues, the world will have about 9 billion people by 2050. Few analysts think that the planet can support this many people; most argue that we must hold the line at about 7 billion, and some argue that we must *decrease* population in the coming decades (Smail, 2007).

A second strategy is to *conserve finite resources*. This means meeting our needs with a responsible eye toward the future by using resources efficiently, seeking alternative sources of energy, and in some cases, learning to live with less.





**Nushawn:** I'm telling you, there are too many people already! Where is everyone going to live?

**Tabitha:** Have you ever been to Kansas? Or Wyoming? There's plenty of empty space out there.

**Marco:** Maybe now. But I'm not so sure about our children—or their children. . . .

Are you worried about the world's increasing population? Think about this: By the time you finish reading this box, more than 1,000 people will have been added to our planet. By this time tomorrow, global population will have risen by more than 220,000. Currently, as the table shows, there are more than four births for every two deaths on the planet, pushing the world's population upward by 83 million annually. Put another way, global population growth amounts to adding another Germany to the world each year.

It is no wonder that many demographers and environmentalists are deeply concerned about the future. Earth has an unprecedented population: The 2.9 billion people we have added since 1974 alone exceed the planet's total in 1900. Might Thomas Robert Malthus, who predicted

that overpopulation would push the world into war and suffering, be right after all? Lester Brown and other *neo-Malthusians* predict a coming apocalypse if we do not change our ways. Brown admits that Malthus failed to imagine how much technology (especially fertilizers and altering plant genetics) could boost the planet's agricultural output. But he maintains that Earth's rising population is rapidly outstripping its finite resources. Families in many poor countries can find little firewood, members of rich countries are depleting the oil reserves, and everyone is draining our supply of clean water and poisoning the planet with waste. Some analysts argue that we have already passed Earth's "carrying capacity" for population and we need to

hold the line or even reduce global population to ensure our long-term survival.

But other analysts, the *anti-Malthusians*, sharply disagree. Julian Simon points out that two centuries after Malthus predicted catastrophe, Earth supports almost six times as many people who, on average, live longer, healthier lives than ever before. With more advanced technology, people have devised ways to increase productivity and limit population increase. As Simon sees it, this is cause for celebration. Human ingenuity has consistently proved the doomsayers wrong, and Simon is betting it will continue to do so.

### Join the Blog!

Where do you place your bet? Do you think Earth can support 8 or 10 billion people? What do you think should be done about global population increase? Go to MySocLab and join the Sociology in Focus blog to share your opinions and experiences and to see what others think.

Sources: Brown (1995), Simon (1995), Scanlon (2001), Small (2007), Population Reference Bureau (2011), and U.S. Census Bureau (2011).

Global Population Increase, 2010

	Births	Deaths	Net Increase
Per year	140,213,443	56,897,968	83,315,475
Per month	11,684,454	4,741,497	6,942,956
Per day	384,146	155,885	228,262
Per hour	16,006	6,495	9,511
Per minute	267	108	159
Per second	4.4	1.8	2.6

A third strategy is to *reduce waste*. Whenever possible, simply using less is the best solution. Learning to live with less is not likely to come easily, but keep in mind the research that suggests that as our society has consumed more and more, people have not become any happier (D. G. Myers, 2000). Recycling programs, too, are part of the answer, and recycling can make everyone part of the solution to our environmental problems.

In the end, making all these strategies work depends on a basic change in the way we think about ourselves and our world. Our *egocentric* outlook sets our own interests as standards for how to live, but a sustainable environment demands an *ecocentric* outlook that helps us see how the present is tied to the future and why everyone must work together. Most nations in the southern half of the world are *underdeveloped*, unable to meet the basic needs of their people. At the same time, most countries in the northern half of the world are *overdeveloped*, using more resources than the planet can sustain over time. The changes needed to create a sustainable ecosystem will not come easily, and they will be costly. But the price

of not responding to the growing environmental deficit will certainly be greater (Kellert & Bormann, 1991; Brown et al., 1993; Population Action International, 2000; Gore, 2006).

Finally, consider that the great dinosaurs dominated this planet for some 160 million years and then perished forever. Humanity is far younger, having existed for a mere 250,000 years. Compared to the rather dimwitted dinosaurs, our species has the gift of great intelligence. But how will we use this ability? What are the chances that our species will continue to flourish 160 million years—or even 160 years—from now? The answer depends on the choices that will be made by one of the 30 million species living on Earth: human beings.



If human ingenuity created the threats to our environment that we now face, can humans also solve these problems? In recent years, a number of designs for small, environmentally friendly cars show the promise of new technology. But do such innovations go far enough? Will we have to make more basic changes to our way of life to ensure human survival in the centuries to come?

# Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life

## CHAPTER 22 Population, Urbanization, and Environment

### Why is the environment a social issue?

As this chapter explains, the state of the natural environment depends on how society is organized, especially the importance a culture attaches to consumption and economic growth.

**Hint** If expansion is “good times,” then contraction is a “recession” or perhaps even a “depression.” Such a worldview means that it is normal—or even desirable—to live in a way that increases stress on the natural environment. Sustainability, an idea that is especially important as world population increases, depends on learning to live with what we have or maybe even learning to live with less. Although many people seem to think so, it really doesn’t require a 6,000-pound SUV to move around urban areas. Actually, it might not require a car at all. This new way of thinking requires that we do not define social standing and personal success in terms of what we own and what we consume. Can you imagine a society like that? What would it be like?

We learn to see economic expansion as natural and good. When the economy stays the same for a number of months, we say we are experiencing “stagnation.” How do we define a period when the economy gets smaller, as happened during the fall of 2008?







What would it take to convince members of our society that smaller (rather than bigger) might be better? Why do we seem to prefer not just bigger cars but also bigger homes and more and more material possessions?

## Seeing Sociology in *Your* Everyday Life

1. Here is an illustration of the problem of runaway growth (Milbrath, 1989:10): “A pond has a single water lily growing on it. The lily doubles in size each day. In thirty days, it covers the entire pond. On which day does it cover half the pond?” When you realize the answer, discuss the implications of this example for population increase.
2. Each of us generates in our minds a “mental map” of cities in which we have lived. Draw a mental map of a city familiar to you with as much detail of specific places, districts, roads, and transportation facilities as you can. After you complete the map, look at what you considered to be important and try to recognize what you left out. One good way to do this is compare your map to a street map or, better yet, compare it to a map drawn by someone else. If you make comparisons, try to account for the differences.
3. Do you think that the world’s increasing population is a problem or not? What about the state of our planet’s natural environment? Go to the “Seeing Sociology in *Your* Everyday Life” feature on [mysoclab.com](http://mysoclab.com) for additional discussion of these issues and suggestions for ways you can become more engaged in promoting a more secure world.

## Demography: The Study of Population

Demography analyzes the size and composition of a population and how and why people move from place to place. Demographers collect data and study several factors that affect population

### Fertility

- Fertility is the incidence of childbearing in a country's population.
- Demographers describe fertility using the **crude birth rate**.

### Mortality

- Mortality is the incidence of death in a country's population.
- Demographers measure mortality using both the **crude death rate** and the **infant mortality rate**.

### Migration

The **net migration rate** is the difference between the in-migration rate and the out-migration rate.

 [Explore the Map](#) on [mysoclab.com](#)



### Population Growth

In general, rich nations grow almost as much from immigration as from natural increase; poorer nations grow almost entirely from natural increase.

### Population Composition

Demographers use **age-sex pyramids** to show the composition of a population graphically and to project population trends. **pp. 512–15**

 [Watch the Video](#) on [mysoclab.com](#)

**demography** (p. 512) the study of human population

**fertility** (p. 512) the incidence of childbearing in a country's population

**crude birth rate** (p. 512) the number of live births in a given year for every 1,000 people in a population

**mortality** (p. 513) the incidence of death in a country's population

**crude death rate** (p. 513) the number of deaths in a given year for every 1,000 people in a population

**infant mortality rate** (p. 513) the number of deaths among infants under one year of age for each 1,000 live births in a given year

**life expectancy** (p. 513) the average life span of a country's population

**migration** (p. 513) the movement of people into and out of a specified territory

**sex ratio** (p. 514) the number of males for every 100 females in a nation's population

**age-sex pyramid** (p. 515) a graphic representation of the age and sex of a population

## History and Theory of Population Growth

- Historically, world population grew slowly because high birth rates were offset by high death rates.
- About 1750, a demographic transition began as world population rose sharply, mostly due to falling death rates.
- In the late 1700s, Thomas Robert Malthus warned that population growth would outpace food production, resulting in social calamity.
- **Demographic transition theory** contends that technological advances gradually slow population increase.
- Currently, the world is gaining 83 million people each year, with 97% of this increase taking place in poor countries. World population is expected to reach about 9 billion by 2050. **pp. 516–20**

### demographic transition theory

(p. 517) a thesis that links population patterns to a society's level of technological development

### zero population growth

(p. 518) the rate of reproduction that maintains population at a steady level

## Urbanization: The Growth of Cities

The **first urban revolution** began with the appearance of cities about 10,000 years ago.

- By about 2,000 years ago, cities had emerged in most regions of the world except North America and Antarctica.
- Preindustrial cities have low-rise buildings; narrow, winding streets; and personal social ties. **p. 520**

A **second urban revolution** began about 1750 as the Industrial Revolution propelled rapid urban growth in Europe.

- The physical form of cities changed as planners created wide, regular streets to facilitate commerce.
- The emphasis on business, as well as the increasing size of cities, made urban life more impersonal. **p. 520**

A **third urban revolution** is now occurring in poor countries. Today, most of the world's largest cities are found in less developed nations. **p. 526**

**In the United States**, urbanization has been going on for more than 400 years and continues today.

- Urbanization came to North America with European colonists.
- By 1850, hundreds of new cities had been founded from coast to coast.
- By 1920, a majority of the U.S. population lived in urban areas.
- Since 1950, the decentralization of cities has resulted in the growth of suburbs and edge cities and a "rebound" in rural population.
- Nationally, Sunbelt cities—but not the older Snowbelt cities—are increasing in size and population. **pp. 520–22**

**urbanization** (p. 520) the concentration of population into cities

**metropolis** (p. 521) a large city that socially and economically dominates an urban area

**suburbs** (p. 521) urban areas beyond the political boundaries of a city

**megalopolis** (p. 522) a vast urban region containing a number of cities and their surrounding suburbs





## Urbanism as a Way of Life

Rapid urbanization during the nineteenth century led early sociologists to study the differences between rural and urban life. These early sociologists included, in Europe, Tönnies, Durkheim, and Simmel, and in the United States, Park and Wirth.

**Ferdinand Tönnies** built his analysis on the concepts of **Gemeinschaft** and **Gesellschaft**.

- **Gemeinschaft**, typical of the rural village, joins people in what amounts to a single primary group.
- **Gesellschaft**, typical of the modern city, describes individuals motivated by their own needs rather than by a desire to help improve the well-being of the community.

**Emile Durkheim** agreed with much of Tönnies's thinking but claimed that urbanites do not lack social bonds; the basis of social solidarity simply differs in the two settings. He described

- **mechanical solidarity**—social bonds based on common sentiments and shared moral values. This type of social solidarity is typical of traditional, rural life.
- **organic solidarity**—social bonds based on specialization and interdependence. This type of social solidarity is typical of modern, urban life.

**Georg Simmel** claimed that the overstimulation of city life produced a blasé attitude in urbanites.

**Robert Park**, at the University of Chicago, claimed that cities permit greater social freedom.

**Louis Wirth** saw large, dense, heterogeneous populations creating an impersonal and self-interested, though tolerant, way of life. **pp. 522–24**

 Read the Document on [mysoclab.com](https://mysoclab.com)

**Gemeinschaft** (p. 523) a type of social organization in which people are closely tied by kinship and tradition

**Gesellschaft** (p. 523) a type of social organization in which people come together only on the basis of individual self-interest

**urban ecology** (p. 524) the study of the link between the physical and social dimensions of cities

## Environment and Society

The state of the **environment** is a social issue because it reflects how human beings organize social life.

- Societies increase the **environmental deficit** by focusing on short-term benefits and ignoring the long-term consequences brought on by their way of life. **pp. 526–27**
- The more complex a society's technology, the greater its capacity to alter the natural environment.
- The *logic-of-growth thesis* supports economic development, claiming that people can solve environmental problems as they arise.
- The *limits-to-growth thesis* states that societies must curb development to prevent eventual environmental collapse. **pp. 527–28**

**Environmental issues** include

- **Disposing of solid waste**—54% of what we throw away ends up in landfills, which are filling up and can pollute groundwater.
- **Protecting the quality of water and air**—The supply of clean water is already low in some parts of the world. Industrial technology has caused a decline in air quality.
- **Protecting the rain forests**—Rain forests help remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and are home to a large share of this planet's living species. Under pressure from development, the world's rain forests are now half their original size and are shrinking by about 1% annually.
- **Environmental racism**—Conflict theory has drawn attention to the pattern by which the poor, especially minorities, suffer most from environmental hazards. **pp. 528–32**



**ecology** (p. 526) the study of the interaction of living organisms and the natural environment

**natural environment** (p. 526) Earth's surface and atmosphere, including living organisms, air, water, soil, and other resources necessary to sustain life

**ecosystem** (p. 527) a system composed of the interaction of all living organisms and their natural environment

**environmental deficit** (p. 527) profound long-term harm to the natural environment caused by humanity's focus on short-term material affluence

**rain forests** (p. 531) regions of dense forestation, most of which circle the globe close to the equator

**global warming** (p. 531) a rise in Earth's average temperature due to an increasing concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere

**environmental racism** (p. 532) patterns of development that expose poor people, especially minorities, to environmental hazards

**ecologically sustainable culture** (p. 532) a way of life that meets the needs of the present generation without threatening the environmental legacy of future generations

# 23 Collective Behavior and Social Movements

## Learning Objectives



**Remember** the definitions of the key terms highlighted in boldfaced type throughout this chapter.



**Understand** how collective behavior differs from other patterns of behavior studied by sociologists.



**Apply** the sociology perspective to a wide range of collective behavior.



**Analyze** social movements using a number of sociological theories.



**Evaluate** the effects of disasters not only in terms of physical damage and loss of life but also in terms of the disruption of human communities.



**Create** a vision of how to bring about desirable social change.







## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter explores the wide-ranging patterns of behavior that sociologists describe as “collective behavior,” including crowd behavior, rumor and gossip, panics, disasters, and social movements. ■



**Many remember it as the day the earth moved.** On March 11, 2011, a 9.0-magnitude earthquake shook the nation of Japan. It pushed the entire country about fifteen feet closer to the United States and even caused a slight change in the way Earth spins on its axis. But these were the observations of scientists. To the people on the ground in northeastern Japan, it was a day that they will never forget. For perhaps 20,000 of them, it was the last day of their lives.

The monster earthquake caused countless buildings to collapse. But that was not the worst of it. Along the coastline, even the strongest buildings—constructed to withstand

such emergencies—were no match for the three-story-tall tsunami wave that was unleashed by the violent movement of the earth beneath the sea. The wave washed across northeastern Japan, topping sea walls and wiping out entire towns.

And even then, the disaster had not ended. The Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station, damaged by the earthquake and then flooded by the giant wave of seawater, began releasing radiation. The radiation was soon measured in the nation’s capital of Tokyo and, within days, slightly elevated radiation levels were even measured in the United States. The long-term effects of this radiation on the Japanese people are still a matter of chilling speculation (Gibbs, 2011).

Across Japan and around the world, people were stunned by television and newspaper images of the devastation caused by this natural disaster. In an age that sometimes tricks us into believing that we have control of nature, the public was reminded how vulnerable we are to forces completely beyond our control. In addition, as happened in 2005 when Hurricane Katrina tore into the city of New Orleans, we had an opportunity to observe how people in a society react to a major disaster, coping with both physical devastation and social disintegration as entire communities are torn apart.

Studying disasters such as the one that continues to threaten the people of Japan is one example of the work sociologists do when they investigate **collective behavior**, *activity involving a large number of people that is unplanned, often controversial, and sometimes dangerous*. This chapter investigates various types of collective behavior, including what happens when people must deal with not only disasters but also mobs and riots, panic and mass hysteria, rumor and gossip, and fashions and fads. In addition, it will examine social movements, a type of collective behavior aimed at changing people’s lives in some important way.

## Studying Collective Behavior

### Understand

Collective behavior is complex and difficult to study for three reasons:

1. **Collective behavior is diverse.** Collective behavior involves a wide range of human action. At first glance, it is difficult to see

what disasters have in common with fads, rumors, and mob behavior.

2. **Collective behavior is variable.** Sometimes a rumor, including the fear some people feel looking ahead to the year 2012, spreads across the United States and around the world. But other rumors quickly die out. Why does one rumor catch on but others do not?
3. **Much collective behavior is transitory.** Sociologists have long studied social institutions such as the family because they are continuing parts of society. Disasters, rumors, and fads, however, come and go quickly.

Some researchers are quick to point out that these problems apply not just to collective behavior but to most forms of human behavior as well (Aguirre & Quarantelli, 1983). In addition, collective behavior is not always so surprising; anyone can predict that crowds will form at sporting events and music festivals, and sociologists can study these gatherings at first hand or record them on videotape to study later. Researchers can even anticipate some natural disasters such as



tornadoes, which are common in some parts of the United States, and be ready to study how people respond to such events (D. L. Miller, 1985).

As a result of their efforts, sociologists now know a great deal about collective behavior. The first lesson to learn is that all collective behavior involves the action of some **collectivity**, a large number of people whose minimal interaction occurs in the absence of well-defined and conventional norms. Collectivities are of two types. A *localized collectivity* refers to people physically close to one another, as in the case of crowds and riots. A *dispersed collectivity* or *mass behavior* involves people who influence one another despite being spread over a large area. Examples of this type of collective behavior include rumors, public opinion, and fashion.

Be sure to keep in mind how collectivities differ from the already familiar concept of social groups (see Chapter 7, “Groups and Organizations”). Here are three key differences:

1. **People in collectivities have little or no social interaction.** People in groups interact frequently and directly; by contrast, people in mobs or other localized collectivities interact very little. Most people taking part in dispersed collectivities, such as a fad, do not interact at all.
2. **Collectivities have no clear social boundaries.** Group members share a sense of identity, but people engaged in collective behavior usually do not. People in a local crowd may have the same object of their attention, such as someone on a ledge threatening to jump, but they feel little sense of unity with those around them. Individuals involved in dispersed collectivities, such as students worried about the possibility of a military draft, have almost no awareness of shared membership. To give another example, people may share concerns over many issues, but usually it is difficult to know exactly who falls within the ranks of, say, the environmental or feminist movement.
3. **Collectivities generate weak and unconventional norms.** Conventional cultural norms usually regulate the behavior of people in groups. Some collectivities, such as people traveling together on an airplane, do observe conventional norms, but their interaction is usually limited to polite small talk with respect for the privacy of others sitting nearby. Other collectivities—such as excited fans after a game who take to the streets drinking and overturning cars—behave according to no clear guidelines (Weller & Quarantelli, 1973; Turner & Killian, 1987).

## Localized Collectivities: Crowds

### Apply

One major form of collective behavior is the **crowd**, a temporary gathering of people who share a common focus of attention and who influence one another. Crowds are a fairly new development: Most of our ancestors never saw a large crowd. In medieval Europe, for example, about the only time large numbers of people gathered in one place was when armies faced off on the battlefield (Laslett, 1984). Today, however, crowds of 25,000 or more are common at rock concerts and sporting events, and even the registration halls of large universities.



On May 2, 2011, a large crowd of people formed in front of the White House in response to the announcement that U.S. military in Pakistan had caused the death of Osama bin Laden. In what ways does such a crowd differ from a more conventional social group? Which type of crowd do we see here?

Some political events and demonstrations, including the rallies in cities of the Middle East in 2011, reached 100,000 people or more. Estimates placed the size of the crowd at President Obama’s inauguration ceremony in Washington, D.C., at about 1.5 million (M. Tucker, 2009; Bialik, 2011).

All crowds include a lot of people, but they differ in their social dynamics. Herbert Blumer (1969) identified four categories of crowds:

A *casual crowd* is a loose collection of people who interact little, if at all. People lying on a beach or people who rush to the scene of an automobile accident have only a passing awareness of one another.

A *conventional crowd* results from deliberate planning, as illustrated by a country auction, a college lecture, or a presidential inauguration. In each case, the behavior of people involved follows a clear set of norms.

An *expressive crowd* forms around an event with emotional appeal, such as a religious revival, an AC/DC concert, or the New Year’s Eve celebration in New York City’s Times Square. Excitement is the main reason people join expressive crowds, which makes this spontaneous experience exhilarating for those involved.

An *acting crowd* is a collectivity motivated by an intense, single-minded purpose, such as an audience rushing the doors of a concert hall or fleeing from a mall after hearing gunshots. Acting crowds are set in motion by powerful emotions, which can sometimes trigger mob violence.

Any crowd can change from one type to another. In 2001, a conventional crowd of more than 10,000 fans filed into a soccer stadium in Johannesburg, South Africa, to watch a match between two rival

**collective behavior** activity involving a large number of people that is unplanned, often controversial, and sometimes dangerous

**collectivity** a large number of people whose minimal interaction occurs in the absence of well-defined and conventional norms

teams. After a goal was scored, the crowd erupted, and people began to push toward the field. Within seconds, an acting crowd had formed, and a stampede began, crushing forty-seven people to death (Nessman, 2001). In 2009, when a USAir jet crash-landed in the Hudson River minutes after taking off from a New York airport, some passengers briefly panicked, creating an acting crowd. But by the time the plane came to rest, people followed directions and evacuated the plane in a surprisingly quiet and conventional manner (Ripley, 2009).

Deliberate action by a crowd is not simply the product of rising emotions. Participants in *protest crowds*—a fifth category we can add to Blumer’s list—may stage marches, boycotts, sit-ins, and strikes for political purposes (McPhail & Wohlstein, 1983). The antigovernment demonstrations that took place in cities across the Middle East during 2010 and 2011 are examples of protest crowds. In some cases, protest crowds have the low-level energy characteristic of a conventional crowd; at other times (especially when government forces go on the offensive), people become emotional enough to form an acting crowd.

## Mobs and Riots

When an acting crowd turns violent, the result may be the birth of a **mob**, *a highly emotional crowd that pursues a violent or destructive goal*. Despite, or perhaps because of, their intense emotions, mobs tend to dissipate quickly. How long a mob continues to exist depends on its precise goals and whether its leadership tries to inflame or calm the crowd.

*Lynching* is the most notorious example of mob behavior in the United States. The term comes from a man named William Lynch, who lived in Virginia during the colonial period. At a time before there were formal police and courts of law, Lynch took it upon himself to enforce law and order in his community. His name soon came to be associated with violence and murder committed outside of the law.

In the United States, lynching has always been colored by race. After the Civil War, so-called lynch mobs terrorized newly freed African Americans. Any person of color who challenged white superiority risked being hanged or burned alive by hate-filled whites.

Lynch mobs—typically composed of poor whites who felt threatened by competition from freed slaves—reached their peak between 1880 and 1930. Police recorded some 5,000 lynchings in that period, though many more undoubtedly occurred. Often lynchings were popular events, attracting hundreds of spectators; sometimes victims were killed quickly, but others were tortured before being put to death. Most of these terrorist killings took place in the Deep South, where the farming economy depended on a cheap and obedient labor force. On the western frontier, lynch mobs targeted people of Mexican and Asian descent. In about 25 percent of reported lynchings, whites killed other whites. Lynching women was rare; only about 100 such cases are known, almost all involving women of color (W. White, 1969, orig. 1929; Grant, 1975; Lacayo, 2000).

A highly energized crowd with no particular purpose is a **riot**, *a social eruption that is highly emotional, violent, and undirected*. Unlike the action of a mob, a riot usually has no clear goal, except perhaps to

express dissatisfaction. The cause of most riots is some long-standing anger or grievance; violent action is ignited by some minor incident that causes people to start destroying property and harming other persons (Smelser, 1962; M. Rosenfeld, 1997). A mob action usually ends when some specific violent goal is accomplished (such as a lynching); a riot tends to go on until the rioters run out of steam or police and community leaders gradually bring them under control.

Throughout our nation’s history, riots have been sparked by social injustice. Industrial workers, for example, have rioted to vent rage over unfair working conditions. In 1886, a bitter struggle by Chicago factory workers for an eight-hour workday led to the explosive Haymarket Riot, which left eleven dead and scores injured. Prison inmates sometimes express anger and despair through riots.

In addition, race riots have occurred in this country with striking regularity. Early in the twentieth century, crowds of whites attacked African Americans in Chicago, Detroit, and other cities. In the 1960s, seemingly trivial events sparked rage at continuing prejudice and discrimination, causing violent riots in numerous inner-city ghettos. In Los Angeles in 1992, the acquittal of white police officers involved in the beating of black motorist Rodney King set off an explosive riot. Violence and fires killed more than fifty people, injured thousands, and destroyed property worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

Not all riots are fueled by hate. They can also begin with very positive feelings. In 2000, for example, young men celebrating New York City’s National Puerto Rican Day began spraying water on young women in the crowd. During the next few hours, sexual violence erupted as dozens of women were groped, stripped, and assaulted—apparently resulting, as one report put it, from a mixture of “marijuana, alcohol, hot weather, testosterone idiocy, and lapses in police [protection]” (Barstow & Chivers, 2000:1). On a number of state university campuses, a win by the home sports team was all it took to send hundreds of students into the streets, drinking alcohol and soon lighting fires and battling with police. As one analyst put it, in an “anything goes” culture, some people think they can get away with whatever they feel like doing (Pitts, 2000; Madensen & Eck, 2006).

## Crowds, Mobs, and Social Change

What does a riot accomplish? One answer is “power.” Ordinary people can gain power when they act collectively. In recent years, demonstrators in New York City, Cincinnati, Los Angeles, and numerous other cities have called national attention to their claim of racial bias on the part of police and caused police departments to carefully review officer conduct. The power of the crowd to challenge the status quo and sometimes to force social change is the reason crowds are controversial. Throughout history, defenders of the status quo have feared “the mob” as a threat. By contrast, those seeking change have supported collective action.

## Explaining Crowd Behavior

What accounts for the behavior of crowds? Social scientists have developed several explanations.

### Contagion Theory

An early explanation of collective behavior was offered by the French sociologist Gustave Le Bon (1841–1931). According to Le Bon’s *conta-*

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<b>crowd</b> a temporary gathering of people who share a common focus of attention and who influence one another	<b>mob</b> a highly emotional crowd that pursues a violent or destructive goal	<b>riot</b> a social eruption that is highly emotional, violent, and undirected
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People came together in 2011 in response to the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster in Japan. In this case, a large crowd formed in Dublin to attend a concert “In Solidarity with the People of Japan.” Which of the theories of crowd behavior found on this page best explains this event?



*gion theory* (1960, orig. 1895), crowds have a hypnotic influence on their members. Shielded by the anonymity found in large numbers, people forget about personal responsibility and give in to the contagious emotions of the crowd. A crowd thus assumes a life of its own, stirring up emotions and driving people toward irrational, even violent, action.

● **Evaluate** Le Bon’s idea that crowds provide anonymity and can generate strong emotions is surely true. Yet as Clark McPhail (1991) claims, a considerable body of research shows that “the madding crowd” does not take on a life of its own. Rather, the crowd’s actions result from policies and decisions made by specific individuals. In 2010, for example, forty-seven people were crushed to death at a German music festival when a crowd of people moving through a tunnel to gain access to the concert grounds suddenly panicked. The police described the situation as “very chaotic.” Later investigation, however, revealed that the panic did not occur because the crowd suddenly and mysteriously “went crazy” but because the police suddenly closed one end of the tunnel while people were pouring in. This action sparked a panic among those who were being crushed inside and had nowhere to go (Grieshaber & Augstein, 2010).

Finally, although collective behavior may involve strong emotions, such feelings may not be irrational, as contagion theory suggests. Emotions—as well as action—can reflect real fear (as panic at a music festival) or result from a sense of injustice (as in the police bias protests) (Jasper, 1998).

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** State the contagion theory of crowd behavior. What are several criticisms of this theory?

### Convergence Theory

*Convergence theory* holds that crowd behavior comes not from the crowd itself but from the particular people who join in. From this point of view, a crowd is a convergence of like-minded individuals. Contagion theory states that crowds cause people to act in a certain way; convergence theory says the opposite, claiming that people who wish to act in a certain way come together to form crowds.

During the last year, the crowds that formed at political demonstrations opposing repressive governments in the Middle East did not

cause participants to oppose their government leaders. On the contrary, participants came together because of already existing political attitudes.

● **Evaluate** By linking crowds to broader social forces, convergence theory rejects Le Bon’s claim that crowd behavior is irrational in favor of the view that people in crowds express existing beliefs and values. But in fairness to Le Bon, people sometimes do things in a crowd that they would not have the courage to do alone, because crowds can spread responsibility among many people. In addition, crowds can intensify an emotion simply by creating a critical mass of like-minded people.

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** State the convergence theory of crowd behavior. What are two criticisms of this theory?

### Emergent-Norm Theory

Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian (1987) developed the *emergent-norm theory* of crowd dynamics. These re-searchers admit that social behavior is never entirely predictable, but if similar interests draw people into a crowd, distinctive patterns of behavior may emerge.

According to Turner and Killian, crowds begin as collectivities containing people with mixed interests and motives. Especially in the case of expressive, acting, and protest crowds, norms may be vague and changing. In the minutes and hours after the earthquake and tsunami devastated Japan, for example, many people fled in terror. But, quickly, people began to come to each other’s aid, and the Japanese resolved to undertake a collective effort to rebuild their way of life. In short, the behavior of people in crowds may change over time as people draw on their traditions or make new rules as they go along.

● **Evaluate** Emergent-norm theory represents a middle-ground approach to crowd dynamics. Turner and Killian (1993) explain that crowd behavior is neither as irrational as contagion theory suggests nor as deliberate as convergence theory implies. Certainly, crowd behavior reflects the desires of participants, but it is also guided by norms that emerge as the situation unfolds.

Decision making does play a role in crowd behavior, although people watching from the sidelines may not realize it. For example, frightened people racing for higher ground may appear to be victims of irrational panic, but from their point of view, fleeing an oncoming tsunami makes a lot of sense.

Emergent-norm theory points out that people in a crowd take on different roles. Some step forward as leaders; others become lieutenants, rank-and-file followers, inactive bystanders, and even opponents (Weller & Quarantelli, 1973; Zurcher & Snow, 1981).

**CRITICAL REVIEW** State the emergent-norm theory of crowd behavior. What are several criticisms of this theory?

**mass behavior** collective behavior among people spread over a wide geographic area

**rumor** unconfirmed information that people spread informally, often by word of mouth  
**gossip** rumor about people's personal affairs

**public opinion** widespread attitudes about controversial issues  
**propaganda** information presented with the intention of shaping public opinion

**fashion** a social pattern favored by a large number of people  
**fad** an unconventional social pattern that people embrace briefly but enthusiastically

**panic** a form of collective behavior in which people in one place react to a threat or other stimulus with irrational, frantic, and often self-destructive behavior

**mass hysteria** or **moral panic** a form of dispersed collective behavior in which people react to a real or imagined event with irrational and even frantic fear

## Dispersed Collectivities: Mass Behavior

### Apply

It is not just people clustered together in crowds who take part in collective behavior. **Mass behavior** refers to *collective behavior among people spread over a wide geographic area*.

### Rumor and Gossip

A common type of mass behavior is **rumor**, *unconfirmed information that people spread informally, often by word of mouth*. People pass along rumors through face-to-face communication, of course, but today's modern technology—including telephones, the mass media, e-mail, text messaging, and the Internet—spreads rumors faster and farther than ever before.

Rumor has three main characteristics:

1. **Rumor thrives in a climate of uncertainty.** Rumors arise when people lack clear and certain information about an issue. The fact that no one really understood why a young gunman killed thirty-three students and professors on the campus of Virginia Tech in 2007 helps explain why rumors were flying on many other campuses that the same type of violence might erupt there.
2. **Rumor is unstable.** People change a rumor as they pass it along, usually giving it a “spin” that serves their own interests. Conservative “law and order” people had one explanation of Virginia Tech violence; more liberal “gun control” advocates had another.
3. **Rumor is difficult to stop.** The number of people aware of a rumor increases very quickly because each person spreads information to many others. The mass media and the Internet can quickly spread local issues and events across the country and around the world. E-mail has particular importance in the process of spreading a rumor because most of us tend to believe something we hear from friends (Garrett, 2011). Eventually, of course, rumors go away. But, in general, the only way to control rumors is for a believable source to issue a clear and convincing statement of the facts.

Rumor can trigger the formation of crowds or other collective behavior. For this reason, officials establish rumor control centers during a crisis in order to manage information. Yet some rumors persist for generations, perhaps just because people enjoy them; the Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life box gives a classic example.

**Gossip** is *rumor about people's personal affairs*. Charles Horton Cooley (1962, orig. 1909) explained that rumor involves some issue many people care about, but gossip interests only a small circle of people who know a particular person. This is why rumors spread widely but gossip tends to be localized.

Communities use gossip as a means of social control, using praise and blame to encourage people to conform to local norms. Also, people gossip about others to put them down and to raise their own standing as social “insiders” (Baumgartner, 1998; Nicholson, 2001). At the same time, no community wants gossip to get out of control to the point that no one knows what to believe, which is why people who gossip too much are criticized as “busybodies.”

### Public Opinion and Propaganda

Another type of dispersed collective behavior is **public opinion**, *widespread attitudes about controversial issues*. Exactly who is, or is not, included in any “public” depends on the issue involved. Over the years in the United States, publics have formed over numerous controversial issues, from global warming and air pollution to handguns and health care. More recently, the public has debated affirmative action, campaign finance reform, and government funding of public radio and television.

Whatever the issue, a small share of people will have no opinion at all; this may be due to either ignorance or indifference. Even on many important issues, surveys show that between 5 and 20 percent of people will have no clear opinion. In some cases, the undecided share of the public can be a majority of people. One 2011 survey that asked people what they thought of the Tea Party movement, for example, found that 55 percent of U.S. adults claimed that they were either not informed enough to have an opinion (36 percent) or they were undecided (19 percent). Others simply refused to say (2 percent) (CBS News, 2011).

Also, not everyone's opinion carries the same weight. Some categories of people are more likely to be asked for their opinion, and what they say will have more clout because they are better educated, wealthier, or better connected. By forming an organization, various categories of people can increase their voice. Through the American Medical Association, for example, physicians have a lot to say about medical care in the United States, just as members of the National Education Association have a great deal of influence on public education.

Special-interest groups and political leaders all try to shape public tastes and attitudes by using **propaganda**, *information presented with the intention of shaping public opinion*. Although we tend to think of propaganda in negative terms, it is not necessarily false. A thin line separates information from propaganda; the difference depends



## Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life



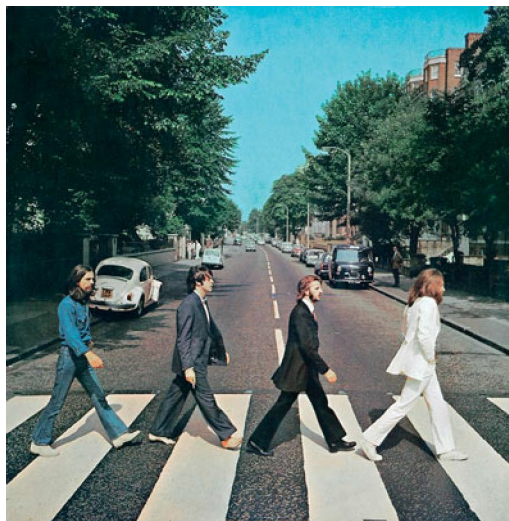
## The Rumor Mill: Paul Is Dead!

Probably the best-known rock group of the twentieth century was the Beatles—Paul McCartney, John Lennon, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr—whose music caused a cultural revolution in the 1960s. However, today's young people may not know the rumor that circulated about Paul McCartney at the height of the group's popularity (Rosnow & Fine, 1976; Kapferer, 1992).

On October 12, 1969, a young man telephoned a Detroit disk jockey to say that he had discovered the following "evidence" that Paul McCartney was dead:

1. At the end of the song "Strawberry Fields Forever" on the *Magical Mystery Tour* album, if you filter out the background noise, you can hear a voice saying, "I buried Paul!"
2. The phrase "Number 9, Number 9, Number 9" from the song "Revolution 9" on *The Beatles* (commonly known as the "White Album"), when played backward, seems to say, "Turn me on, dead man!"  
Two days later, the University of Michigan student newspaper ran a story titled "McCartney Is Dead: Further Clues Found." It sent millions of Beatles fans racing for their albums to confirm the following "tip-offs":
3. A picture inside the *Magical Mystery Tour* album shows John, George, and Ringo wearing red carnations, but Paul is wearing a black flower.
4. The cover of the *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album shows a grave with yellow flowers arranged in the shape of Paul's bass guitar.

5. On the inside of that album, McCartney wears an armpatch with the letters "OPD." Are these the initials of some police department or confirmation that Paul had been "officially pronounced dead"?
6. On the back cover of the same album, three Beatles are facing forward but McCartney has his back to the camera.
7. On the album cover of *Abbey Road*, John Lennon is clothed as a clergyman, Ringo Starr wears an undertaker's black tie, and George Harrison is clad in workman's attire as if ready to dig a grave. McCartney is barefoot, which is how Tibetan ritual says to prepare a corpse for burial.



8. Also on the cover of *Abbey Road*, John Lennon's Volkswagen appears behind Paul with the license plate "28 IF," as if to say that McCartney would be 28 if he were alive.

The rumor began to circulate that McCartney had died of head injuries suffered in an automobile accident in November 1966 and that, after the accident, record company executives had secretly replaced him with a double. This "news" left fans grief-stricken all around the world.

Of course, McCartney was and still is very much alive. He enjoys jokes about the "Paul is dead" episode, and few doubt that he dreamed up some of the details of his own "death" with a little help from his friends. But the story has a serious side, showing how quickly rumors can arise and how they spread in a climate of distrust. In the late 1960s, many young people were quite ready to believe that the media and other powerful interests were conspiring to conceal McCartney's death.

Back in 1969, McCartney himself denied the rumor in a *Life* magazine interview. But thousands of suspicious readers noticed that on the back of the page on which McCartney's picture appeared was an ad for an automobile. Holding this page up to the light, the car lay across McCartney's chest and blocked his head. Another clue!

### What Do You Think?

1. What kinds of issues give rise to rumors?
2. What types of rumors have circulated recently on your campus? What got them started? What made them go away?
3. Overall, do you think rumors are helpful, harmful, or harmless? Why?

mostly on the presenter's intention. We offer *information* to enlighten others; we use *propaganda* to sway people toward our own point of view. Political speeches, commercial advertising, and even some college lectures may include propaganda in an effort to steer people toward thinking or acting in some specific way.

Sometimes, of course, propaganda is a matter of saying something that simply is not true. Often, however, it is a matter of deciding *which* facts to present—a practice that we often refer to as *spin*. For example, in the recent debate over rising oil prices, President Obama claimed that the United States now imports less than half of the oil the nation consumes. Senator McConnell countered that the United States imports more than 60 percent of the oil we consume. Is someone lying? No. The two claims were simply based on different ways of cal-

culating the answer. Each person was dealing with facts but *spinning* the facts to support a particular political position (Morse, 2011).

### Fashions and Fads

Fashions and fads also involve people spread over a large area. A **fashion** is a social pattern favored by a large number of people. People's tastes in clothing, music, and automobiles, as well as ideas about politics, change often, going in and out of fashion.

In preindustrial societies, clothing and personal appearance change very little, reflecting traditional *style*. Women and men, the rich and the poor, lawyers and carpenters wear distinctive clothes and hairstyles that reflect their occupations and social standing (Lofland, 1973; Crane, 2000).

Fashion refers to social patterns that are popular within a society's population. In modern societies, the mass media play an important part in guiding people's tastes. For example, the popular television show *Project Runway* sets standards for attractive clothing. Fads are patterns that change more quickly. *Project Runway* is one example of the recent fad that had brought so many "reality shows" to television.

In industrial societies, however, established style gives way to changing fashion. For one thing, modern people care less about tradition and are often eager to try out new "lifestyles." Higher rates of social mobility also cause people to use their appearance to make a statement about themselves. The German sociologist Georg Simmel (1971, orig. 1904) explained that rich people usually stand out as the trendsetters; with plenty of money to spend on luxuries, they attract lots of attention. As the U.S. sociologist Thorstein Veblen (1953, orig. 1899) put it, fashion involves *conspicuous consumption* as people buy expensive products (from designer handbags to Hummers) not because they need them but simply to show off their wealth.

Ordinary people who want to look wealthy are eager to buy less expensive copies of what the rich make fashionable. In this way, a fashion moves downward through the class structure. But eventually, the fashion loses its prestige when too many average people now share "the look," so the rich move on to something new. In short, fashions are born along the Fifth Avenues and Rodeo Drives of the rich, gain popularity in Targets and Wal-Marts across the country, and are eventually pushed aside in favor of something new.

Since the 1960s, however, there has been a reversal of this pattern in the United States, and many fashions favored by rich people are drawn from people of lower social position. This pattern began with blue jeans, which have long been worn by people doing manual labor. During the civil rights and antiwar movements of the 1960s, denim jeans became popular among college students who wanted to identify with "ordinary people." Today, emblems of the hip-hop culture allow even the most affluent entertainers and celebrities to mimic styles that began among the inner-city poor. Even rich and famous people often identify with their ordinary roots: In one of her songs, Jennifer Lopez sings, "Don't be fooled by the rocks that I've got, I'm still, I'm still Jenny from the block."

A **fad** is an *unconventional social pattern that people embrace briefly but enthusiastically*. Fads, sometimes called *crazes*, are common in high-income societies, where many people have the money to spend on amusing, if often frivolous, things. During the 1950s, two young Californians produced a brightly colored plastic hoop, a version of a toy popular in Australia, that you can swing around your waist by gyrating your hips. The "hula hoop" became a national craze.



In less than a year, hula hoops had all but vanished, only to reappear from time to time. Pokémon cards are another example of the rise and fall of a fad (Aguirre, Quarantelli, & Mendoza, 1988).

How do fads differ from fashions? Fads capture the public imagination but quickly burn out. Because fashions reflect basic cultural values like individuality and sexual attractiveness, they tend to stay around for a while. Therefore, a fashion—but rarely a fad—becomes a more lasting part of popular culture. Streaking, for instance, was a fad that came out of nowhere and soon vanished; denim clothing, however, is an example of fashion that originated in the rough mining camps of Gold Rush California in the 1870s and is still popular today.

## Panic and Mass Hysteria

A **panic** is a form of collective behavior in which people in one place react to a threat or other stimulus with irrational, frantic, and often self-destructive behavior. The classic illustration of a panic is people streaming toward the exits of a crowded theater after someone yells, "Fire!" As they

flee, they trample one another, blocking the exits so that few actually escape.

Closely related to panic is **mass hysteria** or **moral panic**, a form of dispersed collective behavior in which people react to a real or imagined event with irrational and even frantic fear. Whether the cause of the hysteria is real or not, a large number of people take it very seriously.

One example of a moral panic is the controversy set off in the 1960s by flag burning in opposition to the Vietnam War; in the 1980s, the fear of AIDS or of people with AIDS caused a moral panic among some people. More recently, fear of some calamity with the coming of the year 2012 has caused moral panic.

Sometimes such situations pose little real danger to anyone: We'll have to wait and see what happens to our planet in 2012. But in the case of AIDS, there is almost no chance of becoming infected with HIV by simply interacting with someone who has this disease. At another level, however, a fear of AIDS can become a danger if it were to give rise to a hate crime targeting a person with AIDS.

One factor that makes moral panics common in our society is the influence of the mass media. Diseases, disasters, and deadly crime all get intense coverage by television and other media, which hope to gain an audience. As Erich Goode (2000:549) points out, "The mass media thrive on scares; contributing to moral panics is the media's stock in trade." Estimates suggest that there are already millions of Internet Web sites that address fears about the year 2012.

Mass hysteria is sometimes triggered by an event that, at the extreme, sends people into chaotic flight. Of course, people who see others overcome by fear may become more afraid themselves, and the hysteria feeds on itself. When a presidential 747 chased by an Air Force jet flew low over New York City in a 2009 "photo op," it sent





Sociologists classify natural disasters using three types. The 2011 tsunami that brought massive flooding to Japan is an example of a natural disaster. The 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill was a technological disaster. The slaughter of hundreds of thousands of people and the displacement of millions more from their homes since 2003 in the Darfur region of Sudan is an example of an intentional disaster.

thousands of people who remembered the 9/11 attacks running into the streets, although everyone soon realized that there was no real danger.

## Disasters

A **disaster** is an event, generally unexpected, that causes extensive harm to people and damage to property. Disasters are of three types. Earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and forest fires are all examples of *natural disasters* (K. T. Erikson, 2005a). A second type is the *technological disaster*, which is widely regarded as an accident but is more accurately a failure to control technology (K. T. Erikson, 2005a). The 2011 radiation leak from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant is one recent example of a technological disaster. A second is the 2010 oil spill resulting from the explosion on an oil platform in the Gulf of Mexico, which released as much as 200 million gallons of oil into the water. A third type of disaster is the *intentional disaster*, in which one or more organized groups deliberately harm others. War, terrorist attacks, and genocide in places including Libya (2011), the Darfur region of Sudan (2003–2010), Yugoslavia (1992–1995), and Rwanda (1994) are all examples of intentional disasters.

The full scope of the harm caused by disasters may become evident only many years after the event takes place. The Thinking Globally box on page 548 provides an example of a technological disaster that is still affecting people and their descendants more than fifty years after it occurred.

Kai Erikson (1976, 1994, 2005a) has investigated dozens of disasters of all types. From the study of floods, nuclear contamination, oil spills, and genocide, Erikson reached three major conclusions about the consequences of disasters.

First, disasters are *social* events. We all know that disasters harm people and destroy property, but what most people don't realize is that disasters also damage human community. In 1972, when a dam burst and sent a mountain of water down West Virginia's Buffalo Creek, it killed 125 people, destroyed 1,000 homes, and left 4,000 people homeless. After the waters had returned to normal and help was streaming into the area, the people were paralyzed not only by the loss of family members and friends but also by the loss of their entire way of life. Despite nearly forty years of effort, they have not been able to rebuild the community life they once knew. We can pinpoint when disasters start, but as Erikson points out, we cannot predict when their effects will end. The full consequences of the radiation leak in Japan following the 2011 earthquake discussed in the opening to this chapter are still far from clear.

Second, Erikson discovered that the social damage is more serious when an event involves some toxic substance, as is usually the case with technological disasters. As the case of radiation falling on Utrik Island shows us, people feel "poisoned" when they have been exposed to a dangerous substance that they fear and over which they have no control.

Third, the social damage is most serious when the disaster is caused by the actions of other people. This can happen through negligence or carelessness (in the case of technological disasters) or through willful action (in the case of intentional disasters). Our belief that "other people will do us no harm" is a basic foundation of social life, Erikson claims. But when others act carelessly (as in the case of the 2010 Gulf oil spill) or intentionally in ways that harm us (as when some Middle Eastern government leaders used deadly force to put down protests in 2011), those who survive typically lose their trust in others to a degree that may never go away.



It was just after dawn on March 1, 1954, and the air was already warm on Utrik Island, a small bit of coral and volcanic rock in the South Pacific that is one of the Marshall Islands. The island was home to 159 people, who lived by fishing much as their ancestors had done for centuries. The population knew only a little about the outside world—a missionary from the United States taught the local children, and two dozen military personnel lived at a small U.S. weather station with an airstrip that received one plane each week.

At 6:45 A.M., the western sky suddenly lit up brighter than anyone had ever seen, and seconds later, a rumble like a massive earthquake rolled across the island. Some of the Utrik people thought the world was coming to an end. And truly, the world they had always known was gone forever.

About 160 miles to the west, on Bikini Island, the United States military had just detonated an atomic bomb, a huge device with 1,000 times the power of the bomb used at the end of World War II to destroy the Japanese city of Hiroshima. The enormous blast vaporized the entire island and sent a massive cloud of dust and radiation into the atmosphere. The military expected the winds to take the cloud north into an open area of the ocean, but the cloud blew east instead. By noon, the radiation cloud had engulfed a Japanese fishing boat ironically called the *Lucky Dragon*, exposing the twenty-three people on board to a dose of radiation that would eventually sicken or kill them all. By the end of the afternoon, the deadly cloud reached Utrik Island.

The cloud was made up of coral and rock dust—all that was left of Bikini Island. The dust fell softly on Utrik Island, and the children, who remembered pictures of snow shown to them by their missionary teacher, ran out to play in the white powder that was piling up everywhere. No one realized that it was contaminated with deadly radiation.

Three-and-one-half days later, the U.S. military landed planes on Utrik Island and informed all the people that they would have to leave immediately, bringing nothing with them. For three months, the



island people were housed at another military base, and then they were returned home.

Many of the people who were on the island that fateful morning died young, typically from cancer or some other disease associated with radiation exposure. But even today, those who survived consider themselves and their island poisoned by the radiation, and they believe that the poison will never go away. The radiation may or may not still be in their bodies and in the soil and sand on the island, but it has certainly worked its way deep into their culture. More than fifty years after the bomb exploded, people still talk about the morning that “everything changed.” The damage from this disaster turned out to be much more than medical—it was a social transformation that left the people with a deep belief that they are all sick, that life will never be the same, and that powerful people who live on the other side of the world could have prevented the disaster but did not.

### What Do You Think?

1. In what sense is a disaster like this one or the 2011 radiation leak in Japan never really over?
2. In what ways did the atomic bomb test change the culture of the Utrik people?
3. The U.S. government never formally took responsibility for what happened. What elements of global stratification do you see in what happened to the people of Utrik Island?

Source: Based on K. T. Erikson (2005a).

## Social Movements

### Analyze

A **social movement** is an organized activity that encourages or discourages social change. Social movements are among the most important types of collective behavior because they often have lasting effects on our society.

Social movements, such as the political movements that swept across the Middle East in 2011, are common in the modern world. But this was not always the case. Preindustrial societies are tightly bound by tradition, making social movements extremely rare. However, the many subcultures and countercultures found in industrial and postindustrial societies encourage social movements dealing with a wide range of public issues. In the United States, for example, the gay rights movement has won legal changes in numerous cities and several states, forbidding discrimination based on sexual orientation and allowing formal domestic partnership and in some places even legal gay marriage. Like any

social movement that seeks change, the gay rights movement has prompted a countermovement made up of traditionalists who want to limit the social acceptance of homosexuality. In today's society, almost every important public issue gives rise to a social movement favoring change and an opposing countermovement resisting it.


### Types of Social Movements

Sociologists classify social movements according to several variables (Aberle, 1966; Cameron, 1966; Blumer, 1969). One variable asks, *Who is changed?* Some movements target selected people, and others try to change everyone. A second variable asks, *How much change?* Some movements seek only limited change in our lives, and others pursue

**social movement** an organized activity that encourages or discourages social change

**claims making** the process of trying to convince the public and public officials of the importance of joining a social movement to address a particular issue



 **Watch** the video “Defining Social Movements” on [mysoclab.com](http://mysoclab.com)

radical transformation of society. Combining these variables results in four types of social movements, shown in Figure 23–1.

*Alterative social movements* are the least threatening to the status quo because they seek limited change in only a part of the population. Their aim is to help certain people *alter* their lives. Promise Keepers, one example of an alterative social movement, encourages men to live more spiritual lives and be more supportive of their families.

*Redemptive social movements* also target specific people, but they seek radical change. Their aim is to help certain people *redeem* their lives. For example, Alcoholics Anonymous is an organization that helps people with an alcohol addiction to achieve a sober life.

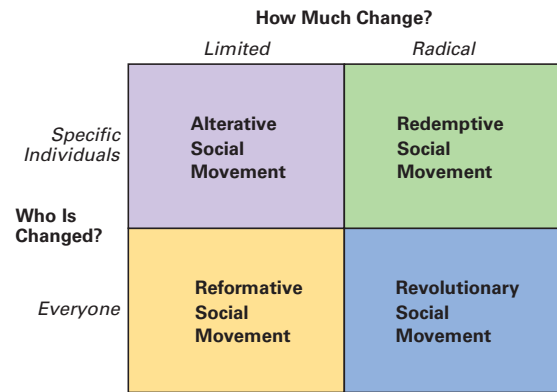
*Reformative social movements* aim for only limited social change but target everyone. Multiculturalism, described in Chapter 3 (“Culture”), is an educational and political movement that advocates social equality for people of all races and ethnicities. Reformative social movements generally work inside the existing political system. Some are *progressive*, promoting a new social pattern, and others are *reactionary*, opposing those who seek change by trying to preserve the status quo or to revive past social patterns. Thus just as multiculturalists push for greater racial equality, white supremacist organizations try to maintain the historical dominance of white people.

*Revolutionary social movements* are the most extreme of all, seeking the transformation of an entire society. Sometimes pursuing specific goals, sometimes spinning utopian dreams, these social movements reject existing social institutions as flawed in favor of a radically new alternative. Both the left-wing Communist party (pushing for government control of the entire economy) and the right-wing militia groups (advocating the destruction of “big government”) seek to radically change our way of life (van Dyke & Soule, 2002).

## Claims Making

In 1981, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention began to track a strange disease that was rapidly killing people, most of them homosexual men. The disease came to be known as AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome). Although this is a deadly disease, there was little public attention and few stories in the mass media. It was only about five years later that the public became aware of the rising number of deaths and began to think of AIDS as a serious social threat.

The change in public thinking was the result of **claims making**, *the process of trying to convince the public and public officials of the importance of joining a social movement to address a particular issue*. In other words, for a social movement to form, some issue has to be defined as a problem that demands public attention. Usually, claims making begins with a small number of people. In the case of AIDS, the gay community in large cities (notably San Francisco and New York) mobilized to convince people of the dangers posed by this deadly disease. Over time, if



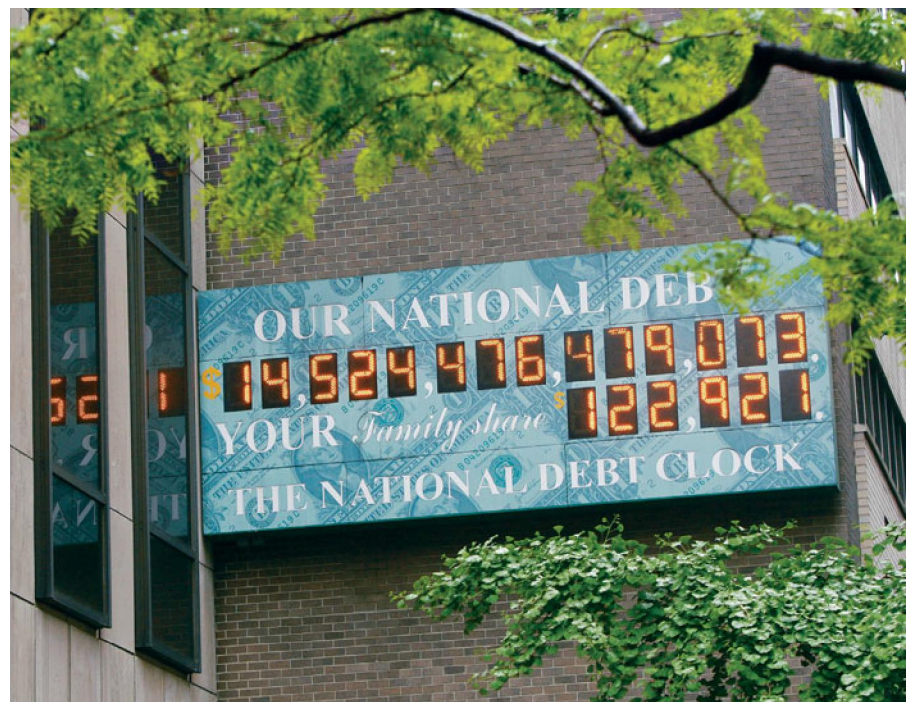
**FIGURE 23–1 Four Types of Social Movements**

There are four types of social movements, reflecting who is changed and how great the change is.

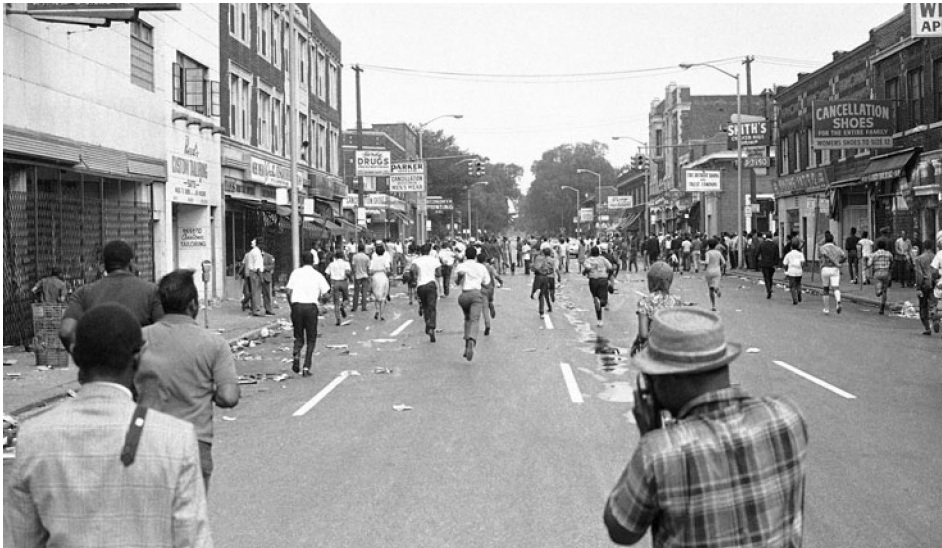
Source: Based on Aberle (1966).

the mass media give the issue attention and public officials speak out on behalf of the problem, it is likely that the social movement will gain strength.

Considerable public attention has now been given to AIDS, and there is ongoing research aimed at finding a cure for this deadly disease. The process of claims making goes on all the time for dozens of issues. Today, for example, a movement to ban the use of cellular telephones in automobiles has pointed to the thousands of automobile accidents each year related to the use of phones while driving; so far, eight states have passed laws banning this practice, twenty others ban cell phones for new drivers, and debate continues elsewhere (McVeigh,



Claims making is the process of trying to convince others of the importance of some problem and the need for specific change. The debate over the federal deficit during 2011 prompted various claims. Perhaps nothing is as direct and effective as the “National Debt Clock,” which shows not only the debt that our country owes but also each citizen’s share of it.



A curious fact is that rioting by African Americans in U.S. cities during the 1960s was more common in the North (here, in Detroit), where good factory jobs were available and living standards were higher, than in the South, where a larger share of people lived in rural areas with lower incomes. Relative deprivation theory explains this apparent contradiction by pointing out that it was in the North, where life had improved, that people came to expect equality. Relative to that goal, the reality of second-class citizenship became intolerable.

Welch, & Bjarnason, 2003; Macionis, 2010; Governors' Highway Safety Association, 2011).

## Explaining Social Movements

Because social movements are intentional and long-lasting, sociologists find this type of collective behavior easier to explain than brief episodes of mob behavior or mass hysteria described earlier in the chapter. Several theories have gained importance.

### Deprivation Theory

*Deprivation theory* holds that social movements seeking change arise among people who feel deprived. People who feel they lack enough income, safe working conditions, basic political rights, or plain human dignity may organize a social movement to bring about a more just state of affairs (Morrison, 1978; J. D. Rose, 1982).

The rise of the Ku Klux Klan and the passage of Jim Crow laws by whites intent on enforcing segregation in the South after the Civil War illustrate deprivation theory. With the end of slavery, white landowners lost a source of free labor, and poorer whites lost the claim that they were socially superior to African Americans. This change produced a sense of deprivation, prompting whites to try to keep all people of color “in their place” (Dollard et al., 1939). African Americans’ deprivation was far greater, of course, but as minorities in a racist society, they had little opportunity to organize. During the twentieth century, however, African Americans did organize successfully in pursuit of racial equality.

As Chapter 7 (“Groups and Organizations”) explains, deprivation is a relative concept. Regardless of anyone’s absolute amount of money and power, people feel either good or bad about their situation only by comparing themselves to some other category of people. **Relative deprivation**, then, is a *perceived disadvantage arising from some specific comparison* (Stouffer et al., 1949; Merton, 1968).

Alexis de Tocqueville’s study of the French Revolution offers a classic illustration of relative deprivation (1955, orig. 1856). Why did rebellion occur in progressive France, where feudalism was breaking down, rather than in more traditional Germany, where peasants were much worse off? Tocqueville’s answer was that as bad as their condition was, German peasants had known nothing but feudal servitude, and so they could imagine little else and had no basis for feeling deprived. French peasants, by contrast, had seen improvements in their lives that made them eager for more change. Consequently, the French—but not the Germans—felt relative deprivation. As Tocqueville saw it, increasing freedom and prosperity did not satisfy people as much as it sparked their desire for an even better life.

Closer to home, Tocqueville’s insight helps explain patterns of rioting during the 1960s. Protest riots involving African Americans took place not in the South, where many black people lived in miserable poverty, but in Detroit at a time when the city’s auto industry was booming, black unemployment was low, and black home ownership was the highest in the country (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 1998).

● **Evaluate** Deprivation theory challenges our commonsense assumption that the worst-off people are the most likely to organize for change. People do not organize simply because they suffer in an absolute sense; rather, social movements arise out of a sense of *relative* deprivation. Both Tocqueville and Marx—as different as they were in many ways—agreed on the importance of relative deprivation in the formation of social movements.

But most people experience some discontent all the time, so deprivation theory leaves us wondering why social movements arise among some categories of people and not others. A second problem is that deprivation theory suffers from circular reasoning: We assume that deprivation causes social movements, but often the only evidence of deprivation is the social movement itself (Jenkins & Perrow, 1977). A third limitation is that this approach focuses on the cause of a social movement and tells us little about what happens after movements take form (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1988).

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** State the basic idea of the deprivation theory of social movements. What are several criticisms of this theory?

### Mass-Society Theory

William Kornhauser’s *mass-society theory* (1959) argues that socially isolated people seek out social movements as a way to gain a sense of belonging and importance. From this point of view, social movements are most likely to arise in impersonal, *mass* societies. This theory points out the *personal* as well as the *political* consequences of social movements that offer a sense of community to people otherwise adrift in society (Melucci, 1989).

It follows, says Kornhauser, that categories of people with weak social ties are those most eager to join a social movement. People who





Social movements are often given great energy by powerful visual images, which is one key idea of culture theory. During World War II, this photo of six soldiers raising the U.S. flag on the tiny Pacific island of Iwo Jima increased morale at home and was the inspiration for a memorial sculpture. Some twenty-five years later, newspapers published the photo on the right, showing children running from a napalm strike by U.S. planes in South Vietnam. The girl in the middle of the picture had ripped the flaming clothes from her body. This photo increased the strength of the social movement against the war in Vietnam.

are well integrated socially, by contrast, are unlikely to seek membership in a social movement.

Kornhauser concludes that activists tend to be psychologically vulnerable people who eagerly join groups and can be manipulated by group leaders. For this reason, Kornhauser claims, social movements are rarely very democratic.

● **Evaluate** To Kornhauser's credit, his theory focuses on both the kind of society that produces social movements and the kinds of people who join them. But one criticism is that there is no clear standard for measuring the extent to which we live in a "mass society," so his thesis is difficult to test.

A second criticism is that explaining social movements in terms of people hungry to belong ignores the social-justice issues that movements address. Put otherwise, mass-society theory suggests that flawed people, rather than a flawed society, are responsible for social movements.

What does research show about mass-society theory? The record is mixed. Research by Frances Piven and Richard Cloward (1977) supports Kornhauser's approach. Piven and Cloward found that a breakdown of routine social patterns has encouraged poor people to form social movements. Also, a study of the New Mexico State Penitentiary found that when prison programs that promoted social ties among inmates were suspended, inmates were more likely to protest their conditions (Useem & Goldstone, 2002).

But other studies cast doubt on this approach. Some researchers conclude that the Nazi movement in Germany did not draw heavily from socially isolated people (Lipset, 1963; Oberschall, 1973). Similarly, many of the people who took part in urban riots during the 1960s had strong ties to their communities (Sears & McConahay, 1973). Evidence also suggests that most young people who join religious movements have fairly normal family ties (Wright & Piper, 1986). Finally, researchers who have examined the biographies of 1960s'

political activists find evidence of deep and continuing commitment to political goals rather than isolation from society (McAdam, 1988, 1989; Whalen & Flacks, 1989).

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** State the basic idea of the mass-society theory of social movements. What are several criticisms of this theory?

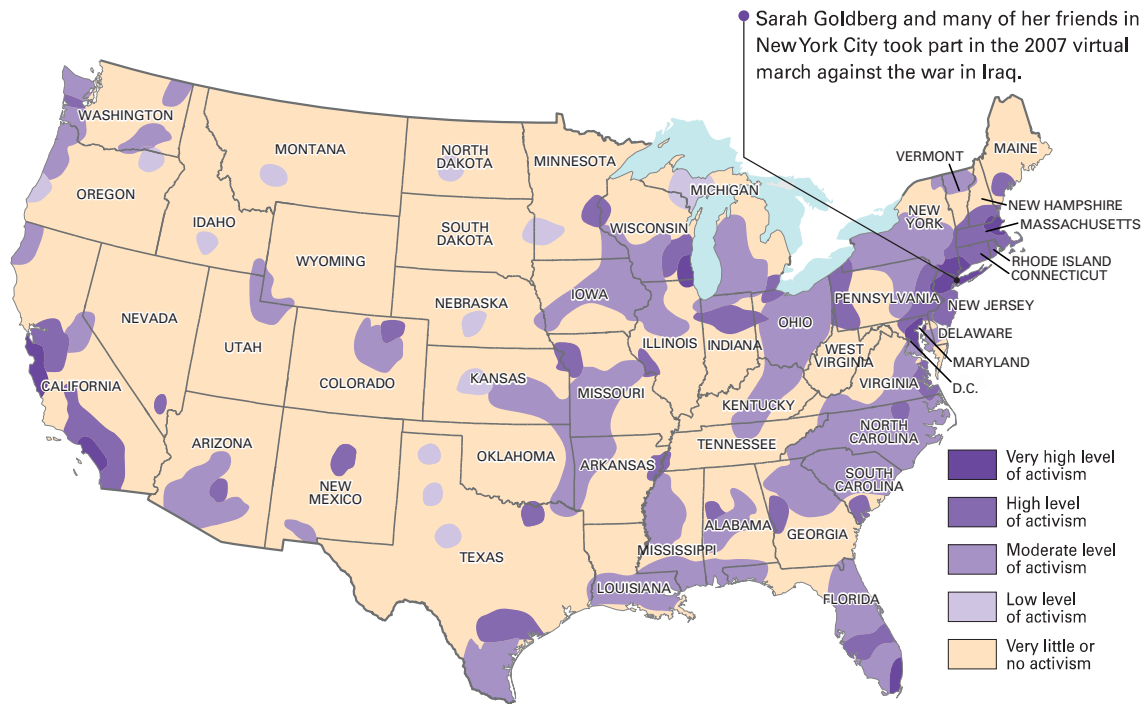
### Culture Theory

In recent years, sociologists have developed *culture theory*, the recognition that social movements depend not only on material resources and the structure of political power but also on cultural symbols. That is, people in any particular situation are likely to mobilize to form a social movement only to the extent that they develop "shared understandings of the world that legitimate and motivate collective action" (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996:6; see also J. E. Williams, 2002).

In part, mobilization depends on a sense of injustice, as suggested by deprivation theory. In addition, people must come to believe that they are not able to respond to their situation effectively by acting alone.

Finally, social movements gain strength as they develop symbols and a sense of community that both build strong feelings and direct energy into organized action. Media images of the burning World Trade Center towers after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, helped mobilize people to support the "war against terrorism." Likewise, photos of gay couples celebrating their weddings have helped fuel both the gay rights movement and the countermovement trying to prevent the spread of gay marriage. Colorful, rubber bracelets are now used by at least a dozen social movements to encourage people to show support for various causes.

● **Evaluate** A strength of culture theory is reminding us that social movements depend not just on material resources but also on cultural symbols. At the same time, powerful symbols (such as the flag and ideas about patriotism and respecting our leaders) help support the status



## Seeing Ourselves

### NATIONAL MAP 23-1 Virtual March: Political Mobilization across the United States

In early 2007, the political action group MoveOn.org organized a “virtual march on Washington,” urging people across the country to call their representatives in Congress to express opposition to the U.S. buildup of troops in Iraq. The map shows the areas in which the most telephone calls were made. What can you say about the places where the mobilization was most and least effective?

 **Explore** left-leaning activism across the United States on [mysoclab.com](http://mysoclab.com)

Source: MoveOn.org (2007).

quo. How and when symbols turn people from supporting the system toward protest against it are questions in need of further research.

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** State the basic idea of the culture theory of social movements. What is the main criticism of this theory?

### Resource-Mobilization Theory

*Resource-mobilization theory* points out that no social movement is likely to succeed—or even get off the ground—without substantial resources, including money, human labor, office and communications equipment, access to the mass media, and a positive public image. In short, any social movement rises or falls on how well it attracts resources, mobilizes people, and forges alliances.

Outsiders can be just as important as insiders in affecting the outcome of a social movement. Because socially disadvantaged people, by definition, lack the money, contacts, leadership skills, and organizational know-how that a successful movement requires, sympathetic outsiders fill the resource gap. In U.S. history, well-to-do white people, including college students, performed a vital service to the black civil rights movement in the 1960s, and affluent men have joined women as leaders of the women’s movement.


Resources connecting people are also vital. The 1989 prodemocracy movement in China was fueled by students whose location on campuses clustered together in Beijing allowed them to build net-

works and recruit new members (Zhao, 1998). More recently, the Internet, including Facebook and Twitter, was an important resource that helped organizations to mobilize hundreds of thousands of people who took part in the political movements in many nations in the Middle East (Preston, 2011).

Closer to home, in the 2008 presidential campaign, YouTube videos of Barack Obama were viewed almost 2 billion times, surely contributing to his success. Today, 41 percent of U.S. voters say they now get most of their political news from the Internet (Pew Research Center, 2011).

Of course, Internet-based activism on any particular issue is not equally likely everywhere in the United States. In 2007, the liberal activist organization MoveOn.org used the Internet to create a “virtual march” in which people across the country telephoned their representatives in Congress to oppose the troop “surge” in Iraq. National Map 23-1 shows where that organization had more or less success in mobilizing opposition to the war in Iraq.

The availability of organizing ideas online has helped people on campuses and elsewhere increase support for various social movements. For example, Take Back the Night is an annual occasion for ral-

 **Read** “The Rise and Fail of Aryan Nations: A Resource Mobilization Perspective” by Robert W. Balch on [mysoclab.com](http://mysoclab.com)



lies at which people speak out in opposition to violence against women, children, and families. Using resources available online, even a small number of people can plan and carry out an effective political event (Passy & Giugni, 2001; Packer, 2003).

● **Evaluate** Resource-mobilization theory recognizes that both resources and discontent are necessary to the success of a social movement. Research confirms the importance of forging alliances to gaining resources and notes that movements with few resources may, in desperation, turn to violence to call attention to their cause (Grant & Wallace, 1991; Jenkins, Jacobs, & Agone, 2003).

Critics of this theory counter that “outside” people and resources are not always needed to ensure a movement’s success. They argue that even relatively powerless segments of a population can promote change if they are able to organize effectively and have strongly committed members (Donnelly & Majka, 1998). Aldon Morris (1981) adds that the success of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s was due to people of color who drew mostly on their own skills and resources. A second problem with this theory is that it overstates the extent to which powerful people are willing to challenge the status quo. Some rich white people did provide valuable resources to the black civil rights movement, but probably more often, elites were indifferent or opposed to significant change (McAdam, 1982, 1983; Pichardo, 1995).

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** State the basic idea of resource-mobilization theory. What are two criticisms of this theory?

### Structural-Strain Theory

One of the most influential theories about social movements was developed by Neil Smelser (1962). *Structural-strain theory* identifies six factors that encourage the development of social movements. Smelser’s theory also suggests which factors encourage unorganized mobs or riots and which encourage highly organized social movements. The prodemocracy movement that transformed Eastern Europe during the late 1980s illustrates Smelser’s theory.

1. **Structural conduciveness.** Social movements begin to emerge when people come to think their society has some serious problems. In Eastern Europe, these problems included low living standards and political repression by national governments.

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Concern for the state of the natural environment is one example of a “new social movement,” one concerned with improving our social and physical surroundings. Actor Leonardo di Caprio recently spoke at one of the Live Earth concerts held simultaneously on seven continents to call attention to global warming and other environmental issues.



2. **Structural strain.** People begin to experience relative deprivation when society fails to meet their expectations. Eastern Europeans joined the prodemocracy movement because they compared their living standards to the higher ones in Western Europe; they also knew that their standard of living was lower than what years of socialist propaganda had led them to expect.
3. **Growth and spread of an explanation.** Forming a well-organized social movement requires a clear statement of not just the problem but also its causes and its solutions. If people are confused about why they are suffering, they will probably express their dissatisfaction in an unorganized way through rioting. In the case of Eastern Europe, intellectuals played a key role in the prodemocracy movement by pointing out economic and political flaws in the socialist system and proposing strategies to increase democracy.
4. **Precipitating factors.** Discontent may exist for a long time before some specific event sparks collective action. Such an event occurred in 1985 when Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in the Soviet Union and began his program of *perestroika* (restructuring). As Moscow relaxed its rigid control over Eastern Europe, people there saw a historic opportunity to reorganize political and economic life and claim greater freedom.
5. **Mobilization for action.** Once people share a concern about some issue, they are ready to take action—to distribute leaflets, stage rallies, and build alliances with sympathetic groups. The initial success of the Solidarity movement in Poland—supported by the Reagan administration in the United States and by Pope John Paul II in the Vatican—mobilized people throughout Eastern Europe to press for change. The rate of change became faster and faster: What had taken a decade in Poland required only months in Hungary and only weeks in other Eastern European nations.
6. **Lack of social control.** The success of any social movement depends in large part on the response of political officials, police, and the military. Sometimes the state moves swiftly to crush a social movement, as happened in the case of prodemocracy forces in the People’s Republic of China. But Gorbachev adopted a policy of nonintervention in Eastern Europe, opening the door for change. Ironically, the movements that began in Eastern Europe soon spread to the Soviet Union itself, ending the historical domination of the Communist party in 1991 and producing a new and much looser political confederation.

● **Evaluate** Smelser’s analysis explains how various factors help or hurt the development of social movements. Structural-strain theory also explains why

people may respond to their problems either by forming organized social movements or through spontaneous mob action.

Yet Smelser's theory contains some of the same circularity of argument found in Kornhauser's analysis. A social movement is caused by strain, says Smelser, but the only evidence of underlying strain is often the social movement itself. What's more, structural-strain theory is incomplete, overlooking the important role that resources like the mass media or international alliances play in the success or failure of a social movement (Jenkins & Perrow, 1977; McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Olzak & West, 1991).

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** According to structural-strain theory, what six factors encourage the formation of social movements? What are two criticisms of this theory?

### Political-Economy Theory

Marxist *political-economy theory* also has something to say about social movements. From this point of view, social movements arise in capitalist societies because the capitalist economic system fails to meet the needs of the majority of people. Despite great economic productivity, U.S. society is in crisis with millions of people unable to find good jobs, living below the poverty line, and living without health insurance.

Social movements arise as a response to such conditions. Workers organize to demand higher wages, citizens rally for a health policy that will protect everyone, and people march in opposition to spending billions to fund wars at the expense of social welfare programs (Buechler, 2000).

**Evaluate** A strength of political-economy theory is its macro-level approach. Other theories explain the rise of social movements

in terms of traits of individuals (such as weak social ties or a sense of relative deprivation) or traits of movements (such as their available resources), but this approach focuses on the institutional structures (the economy and political system) of society itself.

This approach explains social movements concerned with economic issues. But it is less helpful in accounting for the recent rise of social movements concerned with noneconomic issues such as obesity, animal rights, and the state of the natural environment.

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** State the basic idea of the political-economy theory of social movements. What is the main criticism of this theory?

### New Social Movements Theory

A final theoretical approach addresses what are often called "new social movements." *New social movements theory* suggests that recent social movements in the postindustrial societies of North America and Western Europe have a new focus (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1988; Pakulski, 1993; Jenkins & Wallace, 1996).

First, older social movements, such as those led by labor organizations, are concerned mostly with economic issues, but new social movements tend to focus on improving our social and physical surroundings. The environmental movement, for example, is trying to stop global warming and address other environmental dangers such as nuclear safety and conservation of natural resources.

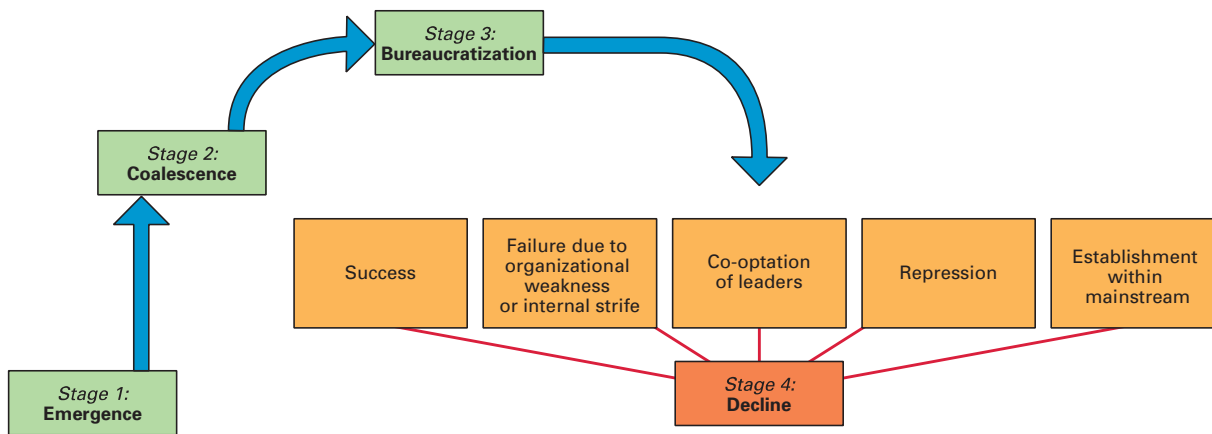
Second, most of today's social movements are international, focusing on global ecology, the social standing of women and gay people, animal rights, and opposition to war. In other words, as the process of globalization links the world's nations, social movements are becoming global.

## Summing Up

### Theories of Social Movements

<b>Deprivation Theory</b>	People experiencing relative deprivation begin social movements. The social movement is a means of seeking change that brings participants greater benefits. Social movements are especially likely when rising expectations are frustrated.
<b>Mass-Society Theory</b>	People who lack established social ties are mobilized into social movements. Periods of social breakdown are likely to spawn social movements. The social movement gives members a sense of belonging and social participation.
<b>Culture Theory</b>	People are drawn to a social movement by cultural symbols that define some cause as just. The movement itself tries to become a symbol of power and justice.
<b>Resource-Mobilization Theory</b>	People may join for all the reasons noted for the first three theories and also because of social ties to existing members. But the success or failure of a social movement depends largely on the resources available to it. Also important is the extent of opposition within the larger society.
<b>Structural-Strain Theory</b>	People come together because of their shared concern about the inability of society to operate as they believe it should. The growth of a social movement reflects many factors, including a belief in its legitimacy and some precipitating event that provokes action.
<b>Political-Economy Theory</b>	People unite to address the societal ills caused by capitalism, including unemployment, poverty, and lack of health care. Social movements are necessary because a capitalist economy inevitably fails to meet people's basic needs.
<b>New Social Movements Theory</b>	People who join social movements are motivated by quality-of-life issues, not necessarily economic concerns. Mobilization is national or international in scope. New social movements arise in response to the expansion of the mass media and new information technology.





**FIGURE 23–2 Stages in the Life of Social Movements**

Social movements typically go through four stages. The last is decline, which may occur for any of five reasons.

Third, most social movements of the past drew strong support from working-class people, but new social movements that focus on noneconomic issues usually draw support from the middle and upper-middle classes. As discussed in Chapter 17 (“Politics and Government”), more affluent people tend to be more conservative on economic issues (because they have wealth to protect) but more liberal on social issues (partly as a result of extensive education). In the United States and other rich nations, the number of highly educated professionals—the people who are most likely to support “new social movements”—is increasing, a fact suggesting that these movements will grow (Jenkins & Wallace, 1996; F. Rose, 1997).

**Evaluate** One strength of new social movements theory is recognizing that social movements have become international along with the global economy. This theory also highlights the power of the mass media and new information technology to unite people around the world in pursuit of political goals.

However, critics claim that this approach exaggerates the differences between past and present social movements. The women’s movement, for example, focuses on many of the same issues—workplace conditions and pay—that have concerned labor organizations for decades. Similarly, many people protesting the use of U.S. military power consider economic equality around the world their primary goal.

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** How do “new” social movements differ from “old” social movements? Each of the seven theories presented here offers some explanation of the emergence of social movements. The Summing Up table reviews them all.

## Gender and Social Movements

Gender figures prominently in the operation of social movements. In keeping with traditional ideas about gender in the United States, more men than women tend to take part in public life, including spearheading social movements.

Investigating Freedom Summer, a 1964 voter registration project in Mississippi, Doug McAdam (1992) found that movement members considered the job of registering African American voters in a hostile

white community dangerous and therefore defined it as “men’s work.” Many of the women in the movement, despite more years of activist experience, ended up working in clerical or teaching assignments behind the scenes. Only the most exceptionally talented and committed women, McAdam found, were able to overcome the movement’s gender barriers.

In short, women have played leading roles in many social movements (including the abolitionist and feminist movements in the United States), but male dominance has been the norm even in social movements that otherwise oppose the status quo. At the same time, the recent political movement that brought change to Egypt included women as well as men in the leadership, suggesting a trend toward greater gender equality (Herda-Rapp, 1998; MacFarquhar, 2011).

## Stages in Social Movements

Despite the many differences that set one social movement apart from another, all unfold in roughly the same way, as shown in Figure 23–2. Researchers have identified four stages in the life of the typical social movement (Blumer, 1969; Mauss, 1975; Tilly, 1978):

### Stage 1: Emergence

Social movements are driven by the perception that all is not well. Some, such as the civil rights and women’s movements, are born of widespread dissatisfaction. Others emerge only as a small vanguard group increases public awareness of some issue. Gay activists, for example, helped raise public concern about the threat posed by AIDS.

### Stage 2: Coalescence

After emerging, a social movement must define itself and develop a strategy for “going public.” Leaders must determine policies, decide on tactics to be used, build morale, and recruit new members. At this stage, the movement may engage in collective action, such as rallies or demonstrations, to attract the attention of the media and increase public awareness. The movement may also form alliances with other organizations to acquire necessary resources.

### Stage 3: Bureaucratization

To become a political force, a social movement must become an established, bureaucratic organization, as described in Chapter 7 (“Groups and Organizations”). As this happens, the movement relies less on the charisma and talents of a few leaders and more on a capable staff. When social movements do not become established in this way, they risk dissolving if the leader steps down, as is the case with many organizations of college activists. By contrast, the National Organization for Women (NOW) is well established and can be counted on to speak for feminists despite its changing leadership.

But becoming more bureaucratic can also hurt a social movement. Surveying the fate of various social movements in U.S. history, Piven and Cloward (1977) found that leaders sometimes become so engrossed in building an organization that they neglect the need to keep people “fired up” for change. In such cases, the radical edge of protest is lost.

### Stage 4: Decline

Eventually, most social movements begin to decline. Frederick Miller (1983) suggests four reasons this can occur.

First, if members have met their goals, decline may simply signal success. For example, the women’s suffrage movement disbanded after it won the right for women to vote. But as is the case with the modern women’s movement, winning one victory leads to the setting of new goals.

Second, a social movement may fold because of organizational failures, such as poor leadership, loss of interest among members, insufficient funds, or repression by authorities. Some people lose interest when the excitement of early efforts is replaced by day-to-day routine. Fragmentation due to internal conflicts over goals and strategies is another common problem. Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), a student movement opposing the war in Vietnam, splintered into several small factions by the end of the 1960s as members disagreed over goals and strategies for change.

Third, a social movement can fall apart if leaders are attracted by offers of money, prestige, or power from within the “system.” This type of “selling out” is one example of the iron law of oligarchy, discussed in Chapter 7 (“Groups and Organizations”): Organizational leaders can use their position to serve their own interests. For example, Vernon Jordan, once head of the activist National Urban League, became a close adviser to President Clinton and a rich and powerful Washington insider. But this process can also work the other way: Some people give up high-paying careers to become activists. Cat Stevens, a rock star of the 1970s, became a Muslim, changed his name to Yusuf Islam, and since then has devoted his life to the spread of his religion.

Fourth and finally, a social movement can be crushed by repression. Officials may destroy a social movement by frightening away participants, discouraging new recruits, and even imprisoning leaders. In general, the more revolutionary the social movement is, the more officials try to repress it. Until 1990, the government of South Africa banned the African National Congress (ANC), a political

organization seeking to overthrow the state-supported system of apartheid. Even suspected members of the ANC were subject to arrest. Only after 1990, when the government lifted the decades-old ban and released from prison ANC leader Nelson Mandela (who was elected the country’s president in 1994) did South Africa begin the journey away from apartheid.

Beyond the reasons noted by Miller, a fifth cause of decline is that a social movement may “go mainstream.” Some movements become an accepted part of the system—typically, after realizing some of their goals—so that they continue to flourish but no longer challenge the status quo. The U.S. labor movement, for example, is now well established; its leaders control vast sums of money and, according to some critics, now have more in common with the business tycoons they opposed in the past than with rank-and-file workers.

## Social Movements and Social Change

Social movements exist to encourage or to resist social change. The political life of our society is based largely on the claims and counterclaims of social movements about what the problems are and which are the right solutions.

But there is little doubt that social movements have changed our way of life. Sometimes we overlook the success of past social movements and take for granted the changes that other people struggled so hard to win. Beginning a century ago, workers’ movements in the United States fought to end child labor in factories, limit working hours, make the workplace safer, and establish workers’ right to bargain collectively with employers. Today’s laws protecting the environment are another product of successful social movements. In addition, women now enjoy greater legal rights and economic opportunities because of the battles won by earlier generations of women.

As the Sociology in Focus box explains, some college students become part of movements seeking social and political goals. Keeping in mind the importance of social movements to the future direction of society, what about you? Are you willing to take a stand?

## Social Movements: Looking Ahead

### Evaluate

Especially since the turbulent 1960s—a decade marked by widespread social protests—U.S. society has been pushed and pulled by many social movements and countermovements calling attention to issues from abortion to financing political campaigns to medical care to war. Of course, different people define the problems in different ways, just as they are likely to settle on different policies as solutions. In short, social movements and the problems they address are always *political* (Macionis, 2010).

For three reasons, the scope of social movements is likely to increase. First, protest should increase as women, African Americans,





**Myisha:** Why don't more students on this campus get involved?

**Deanna:** I have more to do now than I can handle. Who's got time to save the world?

**Justin:** Somebody had better care. The world needs a lot of help!

Are you satisfied with our society as it is? Surely, everyone would change some things about our way of life. Indeed, surveys show that if they could, a lot of people would change plenty! There is considerable pessimism about the state of U.S. society, as shown in the responses to this question: "All in all, are you satisfied with the way things are going in this country?" (Pew Research Center, 2011). Just 22 percent of a representative sample of U.S. adults said "yes" and 73 percent said they were dissatisfied (the remaining 5 percent were unsure).

In light of such widespread dissatisfaction, you might think that most people would be willing to do something about it. You'd be wrong. Survey results show that just 23 percent report giving money to some organization seeking social change, and just 6 percent of U.S. adults say they joined a rally or a march in the last five years (NORC, 2010:1150–51).

Many college students probably suspect that age has something to do with such apathy. That is, young people have the interest and idealism to challenge the status quo, but older adults worry only about their families and their jobs. That sentiment was certainly expressed back in one of the popular sayings of the activist 1960s: "You can't trust anyone over thirty."

But the evidence suggests that it is the times that have changed: Students entering college in 2010 expressed less interest in political issues than their counterparts in the 1960s and 1970s.

As the figure shows, when asked to select important goals in life from a list, just 33 percent of first-year students included "keeping up with political affairs" and 29 percent checked off "participating in community action programs." In addition, just 32 percent of students claimed that they had discussed politics frequently during the past year and just 11 percent reported working on a local, state, or national political campaign. The only item that was endorsed by anything approaching half of all students (45 percent) was publicly stating their opinion by using e-mail, signing a petition, or joining a blog (Pryor et al., 2011).

Certainly, people cite some good reasons to avoid political controversy. Anytime we challenge the system—whether on campus or in the national

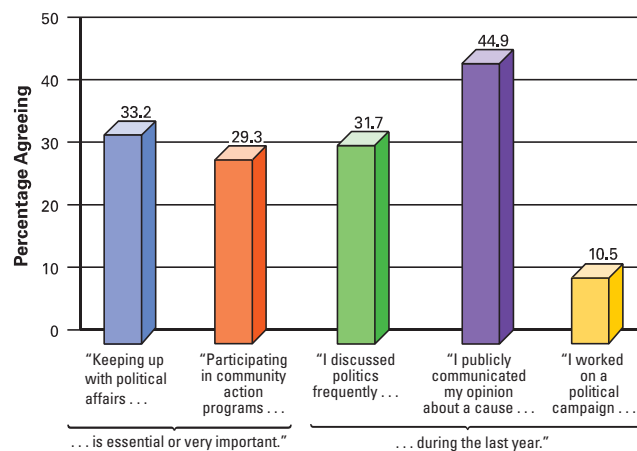
political arena—we risk being criticized and perhaps even making enemies.

But the most important reason that people in the United States avoid joining in social movements may have to do with cultural norms about how change should occur. In our individualistic culture, people favor taking personal responsibility over collective action as a means of addressing social problems. For example, when asked about the best way to deal with problems of inequality linked to race, class, and gender, most U.S. adults say that individuals should rely on hard work and their own efforts, and only a few point to social movements and political activism as the best way to bring about change. This individualistic orientation may be the reason that adults in this country are only half as likely as their European counterparts to join in lawful demonstrations (World Values Survey, 2011).

Sociology, of course, poses a counterpoint to our cultural individualism. As C. Wright Mills (1959) explained decades ago, many of the problems we encounter as individuals are caused by the structure of society. As a result, said Mills, solutions to many of life's problems depend on collective effort—that is, on people willing to take a stand for what they believe.

### Join the Blog!

Have you ever participated in a political demonstration? What were its goals? What did it accomplish? What about the fact that most eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds in the United States do not bother to vote? How do you explain such political apathy? Go to MySocLab and join the Sociology in Focus blog to share your opinions and experiences and to see what others think.



## Student Snapshot

### Political Involvement of Students Entering College in 2010: A Survey

First-year college students are mostly younger people who express limited interest in politics.

Source: Pryor et al. (2011).

gay people, and other historically marginalized categories of our population gain a greater political voice. Second, at a global level, the technology made available by the Information Revolution means that anyone with a television, a personal computer, or a cell phone can be well informed about political events, often as soon as they happen.

Third, new technology and the emerging global economy mean that social movements are now uniting people throughout the entire world. Because many problems are global in scope, we can expect the formation of international social movements seeking to solve them.

# Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life

## CHAPTER 23 Collective Behavior and Social Movements

### What is the scope of today's social movements?

Social movements are about trying to create (or resist) change. Some movements have a local focus, others are national in scope, and still others tackle international or global issues.

**Hint** Every social movement makes a claim about how the world should be. In just about every case, some people disagree, perhaps giving rise to a countermovement. Certainly, many people might agree that tobacco products are harmful, but they also might argue that the best way to reduce tobacco use is not government action (reducing people's freedom) but educating people to make better choices or instituting programs to help people who try to quit. Likewise, "diversity" movements may attract opposition from people opposed to affirmative action or other programs that they see as favoring some racial category. Finally, almost all global issues are also local issues in that they affect life here at home. After all, a disease spreading around the world is a threat to everyone. Countries ravaged by AIDS or hunger can become unstable, threatening global peace.

This group of high school students in Austin, Texas, recently took to the streets as part of an "Up in Smoke" movement seeking higher cigarette taxes and other government action to reduce the use of tobacco products by Texans. Can you imagine a countermovement on this issue? What might its goal be?





These students at Philadelphia's Temple University are taking part in a national social movement aimed at promoting the social diversity of college and university campuses. Has a similar social movement been evident on your campus?



The AIDS epidemic is threatening people all around the world. These students at George Washington University recently wrapped themselves in red tape as a way of saying that the federal government needs to do more to combat global AIDS. How might this global issue affect us here in the United States?



## Seeing Sociology in *Your* Everyday Life

1. What social movements are represented by organizations on your campus? Invite several leaders to describe their group's goals and strategies to your class.
2. With ten friends, try this experiment: One person writes down a detailed "rumor" about someone important and then whispers it to the second person, who whispers it to a third, and so on. The last person to hear the rumor writes it down again. Compare the two versions of the rumor. Are you surprised by the results of your experiment? Why or why not?
3. Are you engaged with social movements on your campus or in your local community? Go to the "Seeing Sociology in *Your* Everyday Life" feature on mysoclab.com to learn more about the importance of social movements and also for suggestions about how you can make a greater difference in the world around you.

### Studying Collective Behavior

**Collective behavior** differs from group behavior:

- Collectivities contain people who have little or no social interaction.
- Collectivities have no clear social boundaries.
- Collectivities generate weak and unconventional norms. **pp. 540–41**



**collective behavior** (p. 540) activity involving a large number of people that is unplanned, often controversial, and sometimes dangerous

**collectivity** (p. 541) a large number of people whose minimal interaction occurs in the absence of well-defined and conventional norms

### Localized Collectivities: Crowds

**Crowds**, an important type of collective behavior, take various forms:

- casual crowds
- conventional crowds
- expressive crowds
- acting crowds
- protest crowds **pp. 541–42**

#### Mobs and Riots

Crowds that become emotionally intense can create violent mobs and riots.

- **Mobs** pursue a specific goal; **rioting** involves unfocused destruction.
- Crowd behavior can threaten the status quo, which is why crowds have figured heavily in social change throughout history. **p. 542**

#### Explaining Crowd Behavior

Social scientists have developed several explanations of crowd behavior:

- **Contagion theory** views crowds as anonymous, suggestible, and swayed by rising emotions.
- **Convergence theory** states that crowd behavior reflects the desires people bring to them.
- **Emergent-norm theory** suggests that crowds develop their own behavior as events unfold.

**pp. 542–43**



**crowd** (p. 541) a temporary gathering of people who share a common focus of attention and who influence one another

**mob** (p. 542) a highly emotional crowd that pursues a violent or destructive goal

**riot** (p. 542) a social eruption that is highly emotional, violent, and undirected

### Dispersed Collectivities: Mass Behavior

#### Rumor and Gossip

**Rumor**—unconfirmed information that people spread informally—thrives in a climate of uncertainty and is difficult to stop.

- Rumor, which involves public issues, can trigger the formation of crowds or other collective behavior.
- **Gossip** is rumor about people's personal affairs. **p. 544**

#### Public Opinion and Propaganda

**Public opinion** consists of people's positions on important, controversial issues.

- Public attitudes change over time, and at any time on any given issue, a small share of people will hold no opinion at all.
- Special-interest groups and political leaders try to shape public attitudes by using **propaganda**. **pp. 544–45**

**mass behavior** (p. 544) collective behavior among people spread over a wide geographic area

**rumor** (p. 544) unconfirmed information that people spread informally, often by word of mouth

**gossip** (p. 544) rumor about people's personal affairs

**public opinion** (p. 544) widespread attitudes about controversial issues

**propaganda** (p. 544) information presented with the intention of shaping public opinion



## Fashions and Fads

People living in industrial societies use **fashion** as a source of social prestige.

- **Fads** are more unconventional than fashions; although people may follow a fad with enthusiasm, it usually goes away in a short time.
- Fashions reflect basic cultural values, which make them more enduring.

pp. 545–46

## Panic and Mass Hysteria

A **panic** (in a local area) and **mass hysteria** (across an entire society) are types of collective behavior in which people respond to a significant event, real or imagined, with irrational, frantic, and often self-destructive behavior.

pp. 546–47

## Disasters

**Disasters** are generally unexpected events that cause great harm to many people. Disasters are of three types:

- **natural disasters** (Example: the 2011 earthquake in Japan)
- **technological disasters** (Example: the 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico)
- **intentional disasters** (Example: Darfur genocide) **p. 547**



**fashion** (p. 545) a social pattern favored by a large number of people

**fad** (p. 546) an unconventional social pattern that people embrace briefly but enthusiastically

**panic** (p. 546) a form of collective behavior in which people in one place react to a threat or other stimulus with irrational, frantic, and often self-destructive behavior

**mass hysteria (moral panic)** (p. 546) a form of dispersed collective behavior in which people react to a real or imagined event with irrational and even frantic fear

**disaster** (p. 547) an event, generally unexpected, that causes extensive harm to people and damage to property

## Social Movements

**Social movements** are an important type of collective behavior.

- Social movements try to promote or discourage change, and they often have a lasting effect on society. **p. 548**

 [Watch the Video on mysoclab.com](#)

### Types of Social Movements

Sociologists classify social movements according to the range of people they try to involve and the extent of change they try to accomplish:

- **Alterative social movements** seek limited change in specific individuals. (Example: Promise Keepers)
- **Redemptive social movements** seek radical change in specific individuals. (Example: Alcoholics Anonymous)
- **Reformative social movements** seek limited change in the whole society. (Example: the environmental movement)
- **Revolutionary social movements** seek radical change in the whole society. (Example: the Communist party)

pp. 548–49

### Explanations of Social Movements

- **Deprivation theory:** Social movements arise among people who feel deprived of something, such as income, safe working conditions, or political rights.
- **Mass-society theory:** Social movements attract socially isolated people who join a movement in order to gain a sense of identity and purpose.
- **Culture theory:** Social movements depend not only on money and resources but also on cultural symbols that motivate people.

- **Resource-mobilization theory:** Success of a social movement is linked to available resources, including money, labor, and the mass media.

 [Read the Document on mysoclab.com](#)

- **Structural-strain theory:** A social movement develops as the result of six factors. Clearly stated grievances encourage the formation of social movements; undirected anger, by contrast, promotes rioting.
- **Political-economy theory:** Social movements arise within capitalist societies that fail to meet the needs of a majority of people.
- **New social movements theory:** Social movements in postindustrial societies are typically international in scope and focus on quality-of-life issues. **pp. 550–55**

 [Explore the Map on mysoclab.com](#)

### Stages in Social Movements

A typical social movement proceeds through consecutive stages:

- **emergence** (defining the public issue)
- **coalescence** (entering the public arena)
- **bureaucratization** (becoming formally organized)
- **decline** (due to failure or, sometimes, success)

pp. 555–56

### social movement

(p. 548) an organized activity that encourages or discourages social change

### claims making

(p. 549) the process of trying to convince the public and public officials of the importance of joining a social movement to address a particular issue

### relative deprivation

(p. 550) a perceived disadvantage arising from some specific comparison

# 24 Social Change: Traditional, Modern, and Postmodern Societies

## Learning Objectives



**Remember** the definitions of the key terms highlighted in boldfaced type throughout this chapter.



**Understand** the major causes of social change.



**Apply** sociology's major theoretical approaches to gain a deeper appreciation of modern society.



**Analyze** modern society guided by major sociological thinkers.



**Evaluate** the benefits and challenges of modern life.



**Create** the capacity to take advantage of the benefits of modern society and effectively respond to its challenges.







## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter explores social change, explaining how modern societies differ from earlier traditional societies. It begins by describing the process of social change and identifying many of its causes. ■



**The five-story, red brick apartment** building at 253 East Tenth Street in New York City has been standing for more than a century. In 1900, one of the twenty small apartments in the building was occupied by thirty-nine-year-old Julius Streicher; Christine Streicher, age thirty-three; and their four young children. The Streichers were immigrants, having come in 1885 from their native Germany to New York, where they met and married.

The Streichers probably considered themselves successful. Julius operated a small clothing shop a few blocks from his apartment; Christine stayed at home, raised the children, and did the housework. Like most people in the country at that time, neither Julius nor Christine had graduated from high school, and they worked ten to twelve hours a day, six days a week. Their income—which was average for that time—was about \$35 a month, or roughly \$425 a year. (In today's dollars, that would be less than \$11,200, which would put the family well below the poverty line.) They spent almost half of their income for food; most of the rest went for rent.

Today, Dorothy Sabo resides at 253 East Tenth Street, living alone in the same apartment where the Streichers spent much of their lives. Now eighty-seven, she is retired from a career teaching art at a nearby museum. In many respects, Sabo's life has been far easier than the life the Streichers knew. For one thing, when the Streichers lived there, the building had no electricity (people used kerosene lamps and candles) and no running water (Christine Streicher spent most of every Monday doing laundry using water she carried from a public fountain at the end of the block). There were no telephones, no television, and of course no computers. Today, Dorothy Sabo takes all these conveniences for granted. Although she is hardly rich, her pension and Social Security amount to several times as much (in constant dollars) as the Streichers earned.

But Sabo has her own worries. She is concerned about the environment and often speaks out about global warming. A century ago, if the Streichers and their neighbors complained about “the environment,” they probably would have meant the smell coming up from the street. At a time when motor vehicles were just beginning to appear in New York City, most carriages, trucks, and trolleys were pulled by horses—thousands of them. These animals dumped 60,000 gallons of urine and 2.5 million pounds of manure on the streets each and every day (Simon & Cannon, 2001).

It is difficult for most people today to imagine how different life was a century ago. Not only was life much harder back then, but it was also much shorter. Statistical records show that a century ago, life expectancy was just forty-six years for men and forty-eight years for women, compared to about seventy-six and eighty-one years today (Kochanek et al., 2011).

Over the past 100 years, much has changed for the better. Yet as this chapter explains, social change is not all positive. Even changes for the better can have negative consequences, creating unexpected new problems. Early sociologists were mixed in their assessment of *modernity*, changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Likewise, today's sociologists point to both good and bad aspects of *postmodernity*, the

recent transformations of society caused by the Information Revolution and the postindustrial economy. One thing is clear: For better and worse, the rate of change has never been faster than it is now.

## What Is Social Change?

### Understand

In earlier chapters, we examined relatively fixed or *static* social patterns, including status and role, social stratification, and social institutions. We also looked at the *dynamic* forces that have shaped our



way of life, ranging from innovations in technology to the growth of bureaucracy and the expansion of cities. These are all dimensions of **social change**, *the transformation of culture and social institutions over time*. The process of social change has four major characteristics:

1. **Social change happens all the time.** “Nothing is constant except death and taxes” goes the old saying. Yet our thoughts about death have changed dramatically as life expectancy in the United States has doubled over the past 100 or so years. And back in the Streichers’ day, people in the United States paid no taxes on their earnings; taxation increased dramatically over the course of the twentieth century, along with the size and scope of government. In short, even the things that seem constant are subject to the twists and turns of change.

Still, some societies change faster than others. As Chapter 4 (“Society”) explained, hunting and gathering societies change quite slowly; members of today’s high-income societies, by contrast, experience significant change within a single lifetime.

It is also true that in a given society, some cultural elements change faster than others. William Ogburn’s theory of *cultural lag* (1964; see Chapter 3, “Culture”) states that material culture (that is, things) usually changes faster than nonmaterial culture (ideas and attitudes). For example, the genetic technology that allows scientists to alter and perhaps even create life has developed more rapidly than our ethical standards for deciding when and how to use the technology.

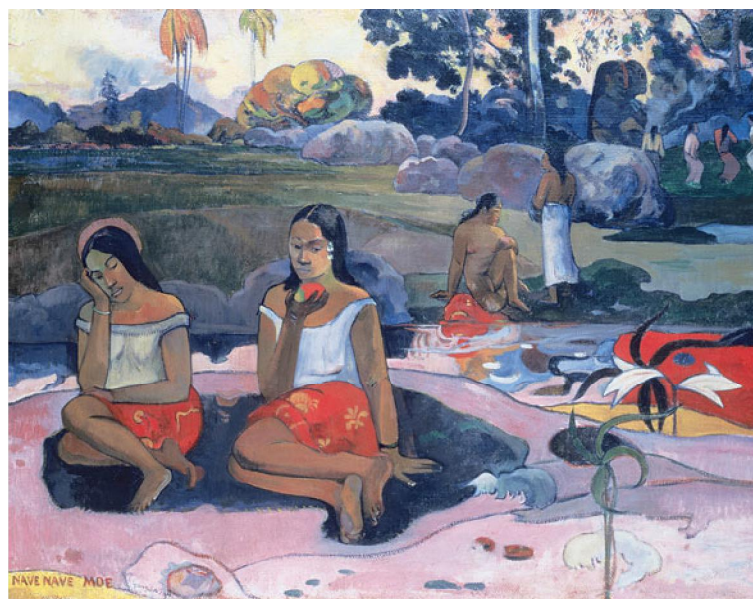
2. **Social change is sometimes intentional but often it is unplanned.** Industrial societies actively promote many kinds of change. For example, scientists seek more efficient forms of energy, and advertisers try to convince us that life is incomplete without a 4G cell phone or the latest electronic gadget. Yet rarely can anyone envision all the consequences of the changes that are set in motion.

Back in 1900, when the country still relied on horses for transportation, many people looked ahead to motorized vehicles that would carry them in a single day distances that used to take weeks or months. But no one could see how much the mobility provided by automobiles would alter everyday life in the United States, scattering family members, threatening the environment, and reshaping cities and suburbs. Nor could automotive pioneers have predicted almost 34,000 deaths that occur in car accidents each year in the United States alone (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2010).

3. **Social change is controversial.** The history of the automobile shows that social change brings both good and bad consequences. Capitalists welcomed the Industrial Revolution because new technology increased productivity and swelled profits. However, workers feared that machines would make their skills obsolete and resisted the push toward “progress.”

Today, as in the past, changing patterns of social interaction between black people and white people, women and men, and gays and heterosexuals are welcomed by some people and opposed by others.

4. **Some changes matter more than others.** Some changes (such as clothing fads) have only passing significance; others (like the



In response to the accelerating pace of change in the nineteenth century, Paul Gauguin left his native France for the South Pacific, where he was captivated by a simpler and seemingly timeless way of life. He romanticized this environment in many paintings, including *Nave Nave Moe (Sacred Spring)*.

Paul Gauguin, French (1848–1903), *Nave Nave Moe (Sacred Spring)*, 1894. Hermitage, Saint Petersburg, Russia. Oil on canvas, 73 × 98 cm. © The Bridgeman Art Library International Ltd.

invention of computers) may change the world. Will the Information Revolution turn out to be as important as the Industrial Revolution? Like the automobile and television, the computer has both positive and negative effects, providing new kinds of jobs while eliminating old ones, linking people in global electronic networks while isolating people in offices, offering vast amounts of information while threatening personal privacy.

## Causes of Social Change

### Understand

Social change has many causes. In a world linked by sophisticated communication and transportation technology, change in one place often sets off change elsewhere.

### Culture and Change

Chapter 3 (“Culture”) identified three important sources of cultural change. First, *invention* produces new objects, ideas, and social patterns. Rocket propulsion research, which began in the 1940s, has produced spacecraft that reach toward the stars. Today we take such technology for granted; during this century, a significant number of people may well travel in space.

Second, *discovery* occurs when people take note of existing elements of the world. For example, medical advances enhance understanding of the human body. Beyond the direct effects on human health, medical discoveries have stretched life expectancy, setting in motion the “graying” of U.S. society (see Chapter 15, “Aging and the Elderly”).

Third, *diffusion* creates change as products, people, and information spread from one society to another. Ralph Linton (1937a)



These young men are performing in a hip-hop dance marathon in Hong Kong. Hip-hop music, dress style, and dancing have become popular in Asia, a clear case of cultural diffusion. Social change occurs as cultural patterns move from place to place, but people in different societies don't always have the same understanding of what these patterns mean. How might Chinese youth understand hip-hop differently from the young African Americans in the United States who originated it?

recognized that many familiar elements of our culture came from other lands. For example, the cloth used to make our clothing was developed in Asia, the clocks we see all around us were invented in Europe, and the coins we carry in our pockets were devised in what is now Turkey.

In general, material things change more quickly than cultural ideas. That is, breakthroughs such as the science of altering and perhaps even creating life are taking place faster than our understanding of when—and even whether—they are morally desirable.

## Conflict and Change

Inequality and conflict in a society also produce change. Karl Marx saw class conflict as the engine that drives societies from one historical era to another (see Chapter 4, “Society,” and Chapter 10, “Social Stratification”). In industrial-capitalist societies, he maintained, the struggle between capitalists and workers pushes society toward a socialist system of production.

In the 130 years since Marx's death, this model has proved simplistic. Yet Marx correctly foresaw that social conflict arising from inequality (involving not just class but also race and gender) would force changes in every society, including our own, to improve the lives of working people.

## Ideas and Change

Max Weber also contributed to our understanding of social change. Although Weber agreed that conflict could bring about change, he traced the roots of most social change to ideas. For example, people with charisma (Martin Luther King Jr. is one example) can carry a message that changes the world.

Weber also highlighted the importance of ideas by showing how the religious beliefs of early Protestants set the stage for the spread of industrial capitalism (see Chapter 4, “Society”). The fact that industrial capitalism developed primarily in areas of Western Europe

where the Protestant work ethic was strong proved to Weber (1958, orig. 1904–05) the power of ideas to bring about change.

Ideas also direct social movements. Chapter 23 (“Collective Behavior and Social Movements”) explained how change occurs when people join together in the pursuit of a common goal, such as cleaning up the environment or improving the lives of oppressed people.

## Demographic Change

Population patterns also play a part in social change. A century ago, as the chapter opening suggested, the typical household (4.8 people) was almost twice as large as it is today (2.6 people). Women are having fewer children, and more people are living alone. In addition, change is taking place as our population grows older. As Chapter 15 (“Aging and the Elderly”) explained, 13 percent of the U.S. population was over age sixty-five in 2010, three times the proportion in 1900. By the year 2030, seniors will account for 20 percent of the total (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Medical research and health care services

already focus extensively on the elderly, and life will change in countless additional ways as homes and household products are redesigned to meet the needs of older consumers.

Migration within and among societies is another demographic factor that promotes change. Between 1870 and 1930, tens of millions of immigrants entered the industrial cities in the United States. Millions more from rural areas joined the rush. As a result, farm communities declined, cities expanded, and for the first time, the United States became a mostly urban nation. Similar changes are taking place today as people move from the Snowbelt to the Sunbelt and mix with new immigrants from Latin America and Asia.

Where in the United States have demographic changes been greatest, and which areas have been least affected? National Map 24–1 provides one answer, showing counties where the largest share of people have lived in their present homes since 1979.

## Modernity

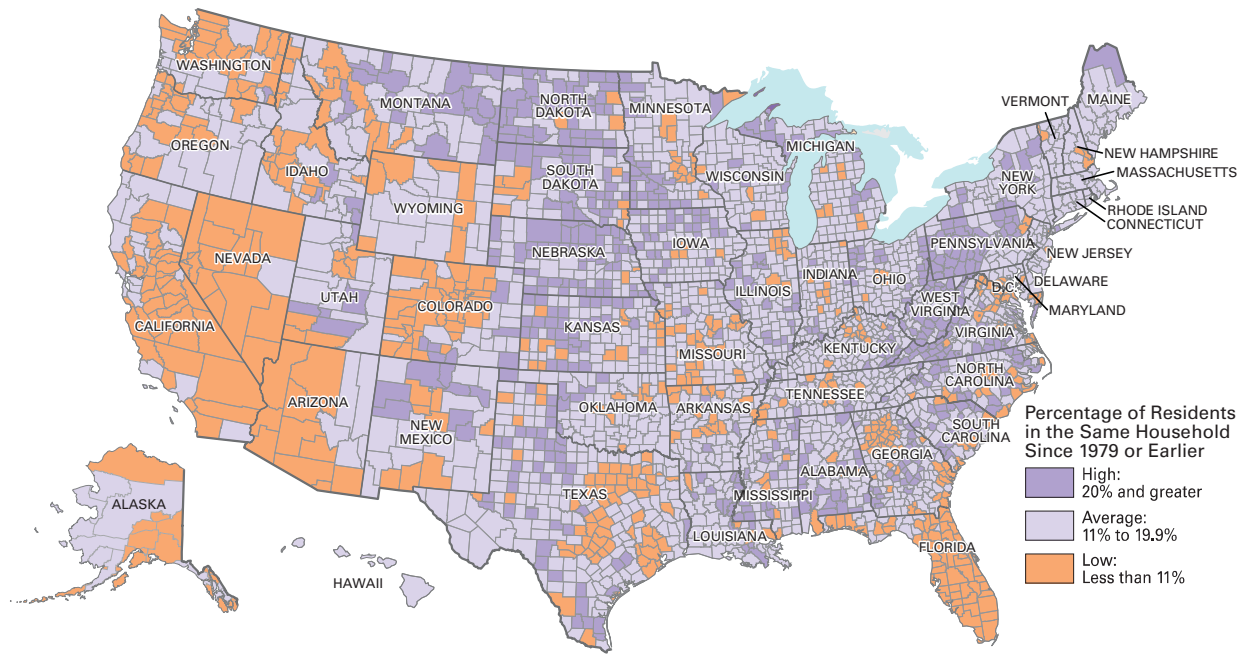
### Analyze

A central concept in the study of social change is **modernity**, *social patterns resulting from industrialization*. In everyday usage, *modernity* (its Latin root means “lately”) refers to the present in relation to the past. Sociologists include in this catchall concept all of the social patterns that were set in motion by the Industrial Revolution, which began in Western Europe in the 1750s. **Modernization**, then, is *the process of social change begun by industrialization*. The timeline inside the back cover of this text highlights important events that mark the emergence of modernity. Table 24–1 provides a snapshot of some of the changes that took place during the twentieth century.

## Four Dimensions of Modernization

Peter Berger (1977) identified four major characteristics of modernization, described on the following pages.





## Seeing Ourselves

### NATIONAL MAP 24-1 Who Stays Put? Residential Stability across the United States

Overall, only about 15.6 percent of housing units in the United States contain people who have lived there for thirty years or longer. Counties with a higher proportion of “long-term neighbors” typically have experienced less change over recent decades: Many neighborhoods have been in place since before World War II, and many of the same families live in them. As you look at the map, what can you say about these stable areas? What accounts for the fact that most of these counties are rural and at some distance from the coasts?

 **Explore** residential stability in your local community and in counties across the United States on [mysoclab.com](https://mysoclab.com)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2010).

**1. The decline of small, traditional communities.** Modernity involves “the progressive weakening, if not destruction, of the . . . relatively cohesive communities in which human beings have found solidarity and meaning throughout most of history” (1977:72). For thousands of years, in the camps of hunters and gatherers and in the rural villages of Europe and North America, people lived in small communities where social life revolved around family and neighborhood. Such traditional worlds gave each person a well-defined place that, although limiting the range of choice, offered a strong sense of identity, belonging, and purpose.

Small, isolated communities still exist in remote corners of the United States, of course, but they are home to only a small percentage of our nation’s people. These days, their isolation is only geographic: Cars, telephones, television, and the Internet give rural families the pulse of the larger society and connect them to the entire world.

**2. The expansion of personal choice.** Members of traditional, preindustrial societies view their lives as shaped by forces beyond human control—gods, spirits, fate. As the power of tradition weakens, people come to see their lives as an unending series of options, a process Berger calls *individualization*. Many people in the United States, for example, choose a “lifestyle” (sometimes adopting one after another), showing an openness to change.

Indeed, a common belief in our modern culture is that people *should* take control of their lives.

**3. Increasing social diversity.** In preindustrial societies, strong family ties and powerful religious beliefs enforce conformity and

**TABLE 24-1** The United States: A Century of Change

	1900	2000
National population	76 million	281 million
Share living in cities	40%	80%
Life expectancy	46 years (men), 48 years (women)	74 years (men), 79 years (women)
Median age	22.9 years	35.3 years
Average household income	\$8,000 (in 2000 dollars)	\$40,000 (in 2000 dollars)
Share of income spent on food	43%	15%
Share of homes with flush toilets	10%	98%
Average number of cars	1 car for every 2,000 households	1.3 cars for every household
Divorce rate	about 1 in 20 marriages	about 8 in 20 marriages
Average gallons of petroleum products consumed	34 per person per year	1,100 per person per year



George Tooker's 1950 painting *The Subway* depicts a common problem of modern life: Weakening social ties and eroding traditions create a generic humanity in which everyone is alike yet each person is an anxious stranger in the midst of others.

Source: George Tooker, *The Subway*, 1950, egg tempera on gesso panel, 18 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 36 $\frac{1}{8}$  inches, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Purchased with funds from the Juliana Force Purchase Award, 50.23. Photograph © Whitney Museum of American Art

## Ferdinand Tönnies: The Loss of Community

The German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1937) produced a lasting account of modernization in his theory of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* (see Chapter 22, “Population, Urbanization, and Environment”). Like Peter Berger, whose work he influenced, Tönnies (1963, orig. 1887) viewed modernization as the progressive loss of *Gemeinschaft*, or human community. As Tönnies saw it, the Industrial Revolution weakened the social fabric of family and tradition by introducing a businesslike emphasis on facts, efficiency, and money. European and North American societies gradually became rootless and impersonal as people came to associate mostly on the basis of self-interest—the state Tönnies termed *Gesellschaft*.

Early in the twentieth century, at least some parts of the United States could be described using Tönnies's concept of *Gemeinschaft*. Families that had lived for generations in small villages and towns were bound together in a hardworking, slow-moving way of life. Telephones (invented in 1876) were rare; not until

1915 could a person place a coast-to-coast call. Living without television (introduced commercially in the 1920s and not widespread until after 1950), families entertained themselves, often gathering with friends in the evening to share stories, sorrows, or song. Lacking rapid transportation (Henry Ford's assembly line began in 1908, but cars became common only after World War II), many people knew little of the world beyond their hometown.

Inevitable tensions and conflicts divided these communities of the past. But according to Tönnies, because of the traditional spirit of *Gemeinschaft*, people were “essentially united in spite of all separating factors” (1963:65, orig. 1887).

Modernity turns societies inside out so that, as Tönnies put it, people are “essentially separated in spite of uniting factors” (1963:65, orig. 1887). This is the world of *Gesellschaft*, where, especially in large cities, most people live among strangers and ignore the people they pass on the street. Trust is hard to come by in a mobile and anonymous society where people tend to put their personal needs ahead of group loyalty and an increasing majority of adults believe “you can't be too careful” in dealing with people (NORC, 2011:2456). No wonder researchers conclude that even as we become more affluent, the social health of modern societies has declined (D. G. Myers, 2000).

**Evaluate** Tönnies's theory of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* is the most widely cited model of modernization. The theory's strength lies in combining various dimensions of change: growing population, the rise of cities, and increasing impersonality in social interaction. But modern life, though often impersonal, still has some degree of *Gemeinschaft*. Even in a world of strangers, modern friendships can be strong and lasting. Some analysts also think that Tönnies favored—perhaps even romanticized—traditional societies while

discourage diversity and change. Modernization promotes a more rational, scientific worldview as tradition loses its hold and people gain more and more individual choice. The growth of cities, the expansion of impersonal bureaucracy, and the social mix of people from various backgrounds combine to encourage diverse beliefs and behavior.

**4. Orientation toward the future and a growing awareness of time.** Premodern people model their lives on the past, but people in modern societies think more about the future. Modern people are not only forward-looking but also optimistic that new inventions and discoveries will improve their lives.

Modern people organize their daily routines down to the very minute. With the introduction of clocks in the late Middle Ages, Europeans began to think of time not in the traditional terms of sunlight and seasons but in terms of the precise calculation of hours and minutes. Preoccupied with efficiency and personal gain, modern people live according to a rational system that demands precise measurement of time; they are likely to claim that “time is money.” Berger (inspired by Weber) points out that one good indicator of a society's degree of modernization is the share of people wearing wristwatches.

Recall that modernization touched off the development of sociology itself. As Chapter 1 (“The Sociological Perspective”) explained, the discipline originated in the wake of the Industrial Revolution in Western Europe, where social change was proceeding most rapidly. Early European and U.S. sociologists tried to analyze the rise of modern society and its consequences, both good and bad, for human beings.

Finally, in the process of comparing industrial societies with those that came before, we find it easy to assume that *everything* in our world is new. This is not the case, of course, as the Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life box on page 570 explains with an historical look at a favorite form of modern clothing—jeans.

**Read** “Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital” by Robert Putnam on [mysoclab.com](http://mysoclab.com)



overlooking bonds of family, neighborhood, and friendship that continue to flourish in modern societies.

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** As types of social organization, how do *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* differ?

## Emile Durkheim: The Division of Labor

The French sociologist Emile Durkheim, whose work is discussed in Chapter 4 (“Society”), shared Tönnies’s interest in the profound social changes that resulted from the Industrial Revolution. For Durkheim (1964a, orig. 1893), modernization is defined by an increasing **division of labor**, or *specialized economic activity*. Every member of a traditional society performs more or less the same daily round of activities; modern societies function by having people perform highly specific jobs.

Durkheim explained that preindustrial societies are held together by *mechanical solidarity*, or shared moral sentiments. In other words, members of preindustrial societies view everyone as basically alike, doing the same kind of work and belonging together. Durkheim’s concept of mechanical solidarity is virtually the same as Tönnies’s *Gemeinschaft*.

With modernization, the division of labor becomes more and more pronounced. To Durkheim, this change means less mechanical solidarity but more of another kind of tie: *organic solidarity*, or mutual dependency between people engaged in specialized work. Put simply, modern societies are held together not by likeness but by difference: All of us must depend on others to meet most of our needs. Organic solidarity corresponds to Tönnies’s concept of *Gesellschaft*.

Despite obvious similarities in their thinking, Durkheim and Tönnies viewed modernity somewhat differently. To Tönnies, modern *Gesellschaft* amounts to the loss of social solidarity, because modern people lose the “natural” and “organic” bonds of the rural village, leaving only the “artificial” and “mechanical” ties of the big, industrial city. Durkheim had a different view of modernity, even reversing Tönnies’s language to bring home the point. Durkheim labeled modern society “organic,” arguing that modern society is no less natural than

any other, and he described traditional societies as “mechanical” because they are so regimented. Durkheim viewed modernization not as the loss of community but as a change from community based on bonds of likeness (kinship and neighborhood) to community based on economic interdependence (the division of labor). Durkheim’s view of modernity is thus both more complex and more positive than Tönnies’s view.

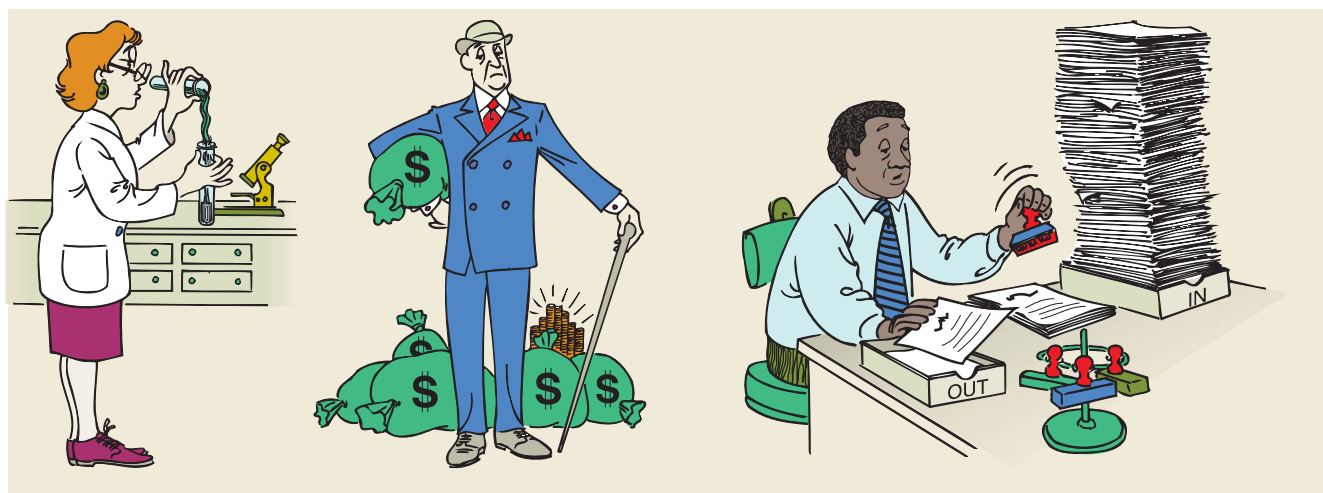
● **Evaluate** Durkheim’s work, which resembles that of Tönnies, is a highly influential analysis of modernity. Of the two, Durkheim was more optimistic; still, he feared that modern societies might become so diverse that they would collapse into **anomie**, a condition in which society provides little moral guidance to individuals. Living with weak moral norms and values, modern people can become egocentric, placing their own needs above those of others and finding little purpose in life.

The suicide rate—which Durkheim considered a good index of anomie—did in fact increase in the United States over the course of the twentieth century, and the vast majority of U.S. adults report that they see moral questions not in clear terms of right and wrong but in confusing “shades of gray” (NORC, 2011:604). Yet shared norms and values still seem strong enough to give most individuals some sense of meaning and purpose. Whatever the hazards of anomie, most people seem to value the personal freedom modern society gives them.

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** Define mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity. In his view of the modern world, what makes Durkheim more optimistic than Tönnies?

## Max Weber: Rationalization

For Max Weber (also discussed in Chapter 4, “Society”), modernity meant replacing a traditional worldview with a rational way of thinking. In preindustrial societies, tradition acts as a constant brake on change. To traditional people, “truth” is roughly the same as “what has always been” (1978:36, orig. 1921). To modern people, however, “truth”



Max Weber maintained that the distinctive character of modern society was its rational worldview. Virtually all of Weber’s work on modernity centered on types of people he considered typical of their age: the scientist, the capitalist, and the bureaucrat. Each is rational to the core: The scientist is committed to the orderly discovery of truth, the capitalist to the orderly pursuit of profit, and the bureaucrat to the orderly conformity to a system of rules.



Sociologists like to contrast “tradition” and “modernity.” Tönnies, Durkheim, Weber, and even Marx developed theories (discussed in various sections of this chapter) that contrasted social patterns that existed “then” with those that exist “now.” Such theories are enlightening. But

thinking in terms of “tradition versus modernity” encourages us to think that the past and the present have little in common.

All the thinkers discussed in this chapter saw past and present as strikingly different. But it is also true that countless elements of today’s society—

ranging from religion to warfare—have been part of human society for a very long time. It is also the case that many cultural elements that we think of as “modern” turn out to have been around much longer than many of us realize.

One element of today’s culture, popular among today’s college students, that we think of as distinctly modern is jeans. This piece of clothing, which is common enough to be considered almost a “uniform” among young people, moved to the center of popular culture when it swept across the college campus in the late 1960s.

But many people would be surprised to learn that jeans have been worn for centuries. To understand more, consider the original meanings of the words used to define this type of clothing. The term *dungarees*, a common name for jeans before the 1960s, is derived from the Hindi word *dungri*, a district of the Indian city Mumbai (formerly Bombay) where the coarse cloth is thought to have originated. From there, the fabric spread westward into Europe. The term *jeans* can be traced back to the name of the Italian city of Genoa, where the cotton fabric was widely worn in the 1650s. Another word for the fabric, *denim*, refers to the French city of Nîmes, reflecting the fact that, somewhat later, people described the cloth as being “de Nîmes.”



In art from the 1500s, we see poor people wearing “jeans.” By the 1800s, jeans had become the uniform for the western cowboy. By the 1960s, jeans became the clothing of choice on the campus. More recently, corporate executives (especially in tech companies) have made jeans acceptable in the workplace.

is the result of rational calculation. Because they value efficiency and have little reverence for the past, once modern people set their goals, they adopt whatever social patterns promise to get them there.

Echoing Tönnies and Durkheim, who held that industrialization weakens tradition, Weber declared modern society to be “disenchanted.” The unquestioned truths of an earlier time are challenged by rational thinking. In short, said Weber, modern society turns away from the gods just as it turns away from the past. Throughout his life, Weber studied various modern “types”—the capitalist, the scientist, the bureaucrat—all of whom share the detached worldview that Weber believed was coming to dominate humanity.

**Evaluate** Compared with Tönnies and especially Durkheim, Weber was very critical of modern society. He knew that science could produce technological and organizational wonders but worried that science was turning us away from more basic questions about the meaning and purpose of human existence. Weber feared that rationalization, especially in bureaucracies, would erode the human spirit with endless rules and regulations.

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** How did Weber understand modernity? What does it mean to say that modern society (think of the scientists, capitalists, and bureaucrats) is “disenchanted”?

Some of Weber’s critics think that the alienation he attributed to bureaucracy actually stemmed from social inequality. That criticism leads us to the ideas of Karl Marx.

### Karl Marx: Capitalism

For Karl Marx, modern society was synonymous with capitalism; he saw the Industrial Revolution as primarily a *capitalist revolution*. Marx traced the emergence of the bourgeoisie in medieval Europe to the expansion of commerce. The bourgeoisie gradually displaced the feudal aristocracy as the Industrial Revolution gave it a powerful new productive system.

Marx agreed that modernity weakened small communities (as described by Tönnies), sharpened the division of labor (as noted by Durkheim), and encouraged a rational worldview (as Weber claimed). But he saw these simply as conditions necessary for capitalism to flourish. Capitalism, according to Marx, draws population from farms and small towns into an ever-expanding market system centered in cities; specialization is needed for efficient factories; and rationality is exemplified by the capitalists’ endless pursuit of profit.

Earlier chapters have painted Marx as a spirited critic of capitalist society, but his vision of modernity also includes a good bit of



Art historians have identified paintings from the sixteenth century that show people—typically the poor—wearing jeans. In the 1700s, British sailors used this fabric not only for making sails but also for constructing hammocks to sleep in and for fashioning shipboard clothing.

More than a century later, in 1853, U.S. clothing manufacturer Levi Strauss sold dungarees to miners who were digging for gold in the California gold rush. The familiar blue and white woven fabric is very strong and durable. Jeans became the clothing of choice among people who had limited budgets and who did demanding physical labor.

After gaining popularity among gold miners, jeans became popular among cowboys all across the western United States. By the beginning of the twentieth century, jeans were worn by almost all working people. By the 1930s, most prisoners across the country also wore denim.

This pattern made jeans a symbol of lower social standing. This fact is surely the reason that many middle-class people looked down on such clothing. As a result, especially in higher-income communities, public school officials banned the wearing of dungarees.

By the 1960s, however, a youth-based counterculture was emerging in the United States. This

new cultural orientation rejected the older pattern of “looking upward” and copying the styles of the rich and famous and, instead, began “looking downward” and adopted the look of working people and even the down and out. By the end of the 1960s, rock stars, Hollywood celebrities, and college students favored jeans as a way to make a statement that they identified with working people—part of the era’s more left-leaning political attitudes.

Of course, there was money to be made in this new trend. By the 1980s, the fashion industry was cashing in on the popularity of jeans by promoting “designer jeans” among more well-off people who probably had never entered a factory in their lives. A teenage Brooke Shields helped launch Calvin Klein jeans (1980) that became all the rage among people who were able to spend three and four times as much as the jeans worn by ordinary people.

By the beginning of this century, jeans had become an accepted form of dress not only in schools but also in the corporate world. Many of the CEOs of U.S. corporations—especially in the high-tech fields—now routinely wear jeans to work and even to public events.

As you can see, jeans turn out to have a very long history. The fact that jeans existed both “then”

and “now,” all the while taking on new and different meanings, reveals the limitation of characterizing cultural elements as either “traditional” or “modern” in a world in which societies invent and reinvent their way of life all the time.

### What Do You Think?

1. Is your attitude toward jeans different from that of your parents? If so, how and why?
2. Do you think the changing trend in the popularity of jeans suggests broader changes in our society before and after the 1960s? Explain.
3. How popular is wearing jeans on your campus? What about among your professors? Can you explain these patterns?

Source: Based, in part, on Brazillian (2011).

optimism. Unlike Weber, who viewed modern society as an “iron cage” of bureaucracy, Marx believed that social conflict in capitalist societies would sow seeds of revolutionary change, leading to an egalitarian socialism. Such a society, as he saw it, would harness the wonders of industrial technology to enrich people’s lives and also rid the world of social classes, the source of social conflict and suffering. Although Marx’s evaluation of modern, capitalist society was negative, he imagined a future of human freedom, creativity, and community.

**Evaluate** Marx’s theory of modernization is a complex theory of capitalism. But he underestimated the dominance of bureaucracy in modern societies. In socialist societies in particular, the stifling effects of bureaucracy turned out to be as bad as, or even worse than, the dehumanizing aspects of capitalism. The upheavals in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s reveal the depth of popular opposition to oppressive state bureaucracies.

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** How did Marx understand modern society? Of the four theorists just discussed—Tönnies, Durkheim, Weber, and Marx—who comes across as the most optimistic about modern society? Who was the most pessimistic? Explain your choices.

## Theories of Modernity

### Apply

The rise of modernity is a complex process involving many dimensions of change, as described in earlier chapters and summarized in the Summing Up table on page 572. How can we make sense of so many changes going on all at once? Sociologists have developed two broad explanations of modern society, one guided by the structural-functional approach and the other based on social-conflict theory.

### Structural-Functional Theory: Modernity as Mass Society

One broad approach—drawing on the ideas of Ferdinand Tönnies, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber—understands modernization as the emergence of *mass society* (Kornhauser, 1959; Nisbet, 1966; Berger, Berger, & Kellner, 1974; Pearson, 1993). A **mass society** is a society in which prosperity and bureaucracy have weakened traditional social ties. A mass society is highly productive; on average, people have more income than ever. At the same time, it is marked by weak kinship and impersonal neighborhoods, leaving individuals to feel socially isolated.

Although many people have material plenty, they are spiritually weak and often experience moral uncertainty about how to live.

### The Mass Scale of Modern Life

**November 11, on Interstate 275.** From the car window, we see BP and Sunoco gas stations, a Kmart and a Wal-Mart, an AmeriSuites hotel, a Bob Evans, a Chi-Chi's Mexican restaurant, and a McDonald's—all big organizations. And it's the same everywhere. This road happens to circle Cincinnati, Ohio. But it could be in Boston, Saint Louis, Denver, San Diego, or almost anywhere else in the United States.

Mass-society theory argues, first, that the scale of modern life has greatly increased. Before the Industrial Revolution, Europe and North America formed a mosaic of rural villages and small towns. In these local communities, which inspired Tönnies's concept of *Gemeinschaft*, people lived out their lives surrounded by kin and guided by a shared heritage. Gossip was an informal yet highly effective way of ensuring conformity to community standards. These small communities, with their strong moral values and their

low tolerance of social diversity, exemplified the state of mechanical solidarity described by Durkheim.

For example, before 1690, English law demanded that everyone participate regularly in the Christian ritual of Holy Communion (Laslett, 1984). On the North American continent, only Rhode Island among the New England colonies tolerated religious dissent. Because social differences were repressed in favor of conformity to established norms, subcultures and countercultures were few, and change proceeded slowly.

Increasing population, the growth of cities, and specialized economic activity driven by the Industrial Revolution gradually altered this pattern. People came to know one another by their jobs (for example, as “the doctor” or “the bank clerk”) rather than by their kinship group or hometown. People looked on most others as strangers. The face-to-face communication of the village was eventually replaced by the impersonal mass media: newspapers, radio, television, and computer networks. Large organizations steadily assumed more and more responsibility for seeing to the daily tasks that had once been carried out by family, friends, and neighbors; public education drew more and

## Summing Up

### Traditional and Modern Societies: The Big Picture

Elements of Society	Traditional Societies	Modern Societies
<b>Cultural Patterns</b>		
Values	Homogeneous; sacred character; few subcultures and counter-cultures	Heterogeneous; secular character; many subcultures and countercultures
Norms	Great moral significance; little tolerance of diversity	Variable moral significance; high tolerance of diversity
Time orientation	Present linked to past	Present linked to future
Technology	Preindustrial; human and animal energy	Industrial; advanced energy sources
<b>Social Structure</b>		
Status and role	Few statuses, most ascribed; few specialized roles	Many statuses, some ascribed and some achieved; many specialized roles
Relationships	Typically primary; little anonymity or privacy	Typically secondary; much anonymity and privacy
Communication	Face to face	Face-to-face communication supplemented by mass media
Social control	Informal gossip	Formal police and legal system
Social stratification	Rigid patterns of social inequality; little mobility	Fluid patterns of social inequality; high mobility
Gender patterns	Pronounced patriarchy; women's lives centered on the home	Declining patriarchy; increasing number of women in the paid labor force
Settlement patterns	Small-scale; population typically small and widely dispersed in rural villages and small towns	Large-scale; population typically large and concentrated in cities
<b>Social Institutions</b>		
Economy	Based on agriculture; much manufacturing in the home; little white-collar work	Based on industrial mass production; factories become centers of production; increasing white-collar work
State	Small-scale government; little state intervention in society	Large-scale government; much state intervention in society
Family	Extended family as the primary means of socialization and economic production	Nuclear family retains some socialization functions but is more a unit of consumption than of production
Religion	Religion guides worldview; little religious pluralism	Religion weakens with the rise of science; extensive religious pluralism
Education	Formal schooling limited to elites	Basic schooling becomes universal, with growing proportion receiving advanced education
Health	High birth and death rates; short life expectancy because of low standard of living and simple medical technology	Low birth and death rates; longer life expectancy because of higher standard of living and sophisticated medical technology
Social Change	Slow; change evident over many generations	Rapid; change evident within a single generation



more people to schools; police, lawyers, and courts supervised a formal criminal justice system. Even charity became the work of faceless bureaucrats working for various social welfare agencies.

Geographic mobility and exposure to diverse ways of life all weaken traditional values. People become more tolerant of social diversity, defending individual rights and freedom of choice. Treating people differently because of their race, sex, or religion comes to be defined as backward and unjust. In the process, minorities at the margins of society gain greater power and broader participation in public life. The election of Barack Obama—an African American—to the highest office in the United States is surely one indicator that ours is now a modern society (West, 2008).

The mass media give rise to a national culture that washes over traditional differences that used to set off one region from another. As one analyst put it, “Even in Baton Rouge, La., the local kids don’t say ‘y’all’ anymore; they say ‘you guys’ just like on TV” (Gibbs, 2000:42). In this way, mass-society theorists fear, transforming people of various backgrounds into a generic mass may end up dehumanizing everyone.

### The Ever-Expanding State

In the small-scale preindustrial societies of Europe, government amounted to little more than a local noble. A royal family formally reigned over an entire nation, but without efficient transportation and efficient communication, even absolute monarchs had far less power than today’s political leaders.

As technological innovation allowed government to expand, the centralized state grew in size and importance. At the time the United States gained independence from Great Britain, the federal government was a tiny organization with the main purpose of providing national defense. Since then, government has assumed responsibility for more and more areas of social life: schooling the population, regulating wages and working conditions, establishing standards for products of all sorts, offering financial assistance to the ill and the unemployed, providing loans to students, and recently, bailing out corporations facing economic ruin. To pay for such programs, taxes have soared: Today’s average worker labors about four months each year to pay for the broad array of services that government provides.

In a mass society, power resides in large bureaucracies, leaving people in local communities with little control over their lives. For example, state officials mandate that local schools must have a standardized educational program, local products must be government-certified, and every citizen must maintain extensive tax records. Although such regulations may protect people and advance social equality, they also force us to deal more and more with nameless officials in distant and often unresponsive bureaucracies, and they undermine the autonomy of families and local communities.

**Evaluate** The growing scale of modern life certainly has positive aspects, but only at the price of losing some of our cultural heritage. Modern societies increase individual rights, tolerate greater social differences, and raise standards of living (Inglehart & Baker,



Social-conflict theory sees modernity not as an impersonal mass society but as an unequal class society in which some categories of people are second-class citizens. This Arizona family, like many Native Americans, lives on a reservation, where poverty is widespread and many trailer homes do not have electricity or running water.

2000). But they are prone to what Weber feared most—excessive bureaucracy—as well as Tönnies’s self-centeredness and Durkheim’s anomie. Modern society’s size, complexity, and tolerance of diversity all but doom traditional values and family patterns, leaving individuals isolated, powerless, and materialistic. As Chapter 17 (“Politics and Government”) notes, voter apathy is a serious problem in the United States. But should we be surprised that individuals in vast, impersonal societies think no one person can make much of a difference?

Critics sometimes say that mass-society theory romanticizes the past. They remind us that many people in small towns were actually eager to set out for a better standard of living in cities. This approach also ignores problems of social inequality. Critics say this theory attracts conservatives who defend conventional morality and overlook the historical inequality of women and other minorities.

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** In your own words, state the mass-society theory of modernity. What are two criticisms of it?

### Social-Conflict Theory: Modernity as Class Society

The second interpretation of modernity derives largely from the ideas of Karl Marx. From a social-conflict perspective, modernity takes the form of a **class society**, a capitalist society with pronounced social stratification. That is, although agreeing that modern societies have expanded to a mass scale, this approach views the heart of modern-

**mass society** a society in which prosperity and bureaucracy have weakened traditional social ties

**class society** a capitalist society with pronounced social stratification

ization as an expanding capitalist economy, marked with inequality (Habermas, 1970; Harrington, 1984; Buechler, 2000).

## Capitalism

Class-society theory follows Marx in claiming that the increasing scale of social life in modern society results from the growth and greed unleashed by capitalism. Because a capitalist economy pursues ever-greater profits, both production and consumption steadily increase.

According to Marx, capitalism rests on “naked self-interest” (Marx & Engels, 1972:337, orig. 1848). This self-centeredness weakens the social ties that once united small communities. Under capitalism, people are transformed into commodities: a source of labor and a market for capitalist products.

Capitalism supports science, not just as the key to greater productivity but also as an ideology that justifies the status quo. That is, modern societies encourage people to view human well-being as a technical puzzle to be solved by engineers and other experts rather than through the pursuit of social justice. For example, a capitalist culture seeks to improve health through scientific medicine rather than by eliminating poverty, which is a core cause of poor health.

Business also raises the banner of scientific logic, trying to increase profits through greater efficiency. As Chapter 16 (“The Economy and Work”) explains, today’s capitalist corporations have reached enormous size and control unimaginable wealth as a result of globalization. From the class-society point of view, the expanding scale of life is less a function of *Gesellschaft* than the inevitable and destructive consequence of capitalism.


## Persistent Inequality

Modernity has gradually worn away the rigid categories that set nobles apart from commoners in preindustrial societies. But class-society theory points out elites are still with us, not as the nobles of an earlier era perhaps but in the form of capitalist millionaires. In short, a few people are still born to wealth and power. The United States may have no hereditary monarchy, but the richest 5 percent of the population controls about 60 percent of all privately held property (Keister, 2005; Wolff, 2009).

What of the state? Mass-society theorists argue that the state works to increase equality and fight social problems. Marx disagreed; he doubted that the state could accomplish more than minor reforms because as he saw it, real power lies in the hands of capitalists, who control the economy. Other class-society theorists add that to the extent that working people and minorities do enjoy greater political rights and a higher standard of living today, these changes were

 **Watch** “A Society of Consumers” on [mysoclab.com](https://mysoclab.com)

the result of political struggle, not government goodwill. In short, they conclude, despite our pretensions of democracy, our political economy leaves most people powerless in the face of wealthy elites.

 **Evaluate** Class-society theory dismisses Durkheim’s argument that people in modern societies suffer from anomie, claiming instead that they suffer from alienation and powerlessness. Not surprisingly, the class-society interpretation of modernity enjoys widespread support among liberals and radicals who favor greater equality and call for extensive regulation (or abolition) of the capitalist marketplace.

A basic criticism of class-society theory is that it overlooks the long-term increasing prosperity of modern societies and the fact that discrimination based on race, ethnicity, and gender is now illegal and is widely regarded as a social problem. In addition, most people in the United States do not want an egalitarian society; they prefer a system of unequal rewards that reflects personal differences in talent and effort.

Based on socialism’s failure to generate a high standard of living, few observers think that a centralized economy would cure the ills of modernity. The United States may face a number of social problems—from unemployment to hunger and industrial pollution to war—but these problems are also found in socialist nations.

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** In your own words, state the class-society theory of modernity. What are several criticisms of it?

The Summing Up table contrasts the two interpretations of modernity. Mass-society theory focuses on the increasing scale of life and the growth of government; class-society theory stresses the expansion of capitalism and the persistence of inequality.

## Modernity and the Individual

Both mass- and class-society theories look at the broad societal changes that have taken place since the Industrial Revolution. But from these macro-level approaches we can also draw micro-level insights into how modernity shapes individual lives.

### Mass Society: Problems of Identity

Modernity freed individuals from the small, tightly knit communities of the past. Most people in modern societies have the privacy and freedom to express their individuality. However, mass-society theory suggests that so much social diversity, widespread isolation, and rapid

## Summing Up

### Two Interpretations of Modernity

	Mass Society	Class Society
<b>Process of modernization</b>	Industrialization; growth of bureaucracy	Rise of capitalism
<b>Effects of modernization</b>	Increasing scale of life; rise of the state and other formal organizations	Expansion of the capitalist economy; persistence of social inequality





Mass-society theory relates feelings of anxiety and lack of meaning in the modern world to rapid social change that washes away tradition. This notion of modern emptiness and isolation is captured in the photo at the left. Class-society theory, by contrast, ties such feelings to social inequality, by which some categories of people are made into second-class citizens (or not made citizens at all), an idea expressed in the photo at the right.

social change make it difficult for many people to establish any coherent identity at all (Wheelis, 1958; Berger, Berger, & Kellner, 1974).

As Chapter 5 (“Socialization”) explains, people’s personalities are largely a product of their social experiences. The small, homogeneous, and slowly changing societies of the past provided a firm, if narrow, foundation for building a personal identity. Even today, the Amish communities that flourish in the United States and Canada teach young men and women “correct” ways to think and behave. Not everyone born into an Amish community can tolerate strict demands for conformity, but most members establish a well-integrated and satisfying personal identity (Kraybill & Olshan, 1994; Kraybill & Hurd, 2006).

Mass societies are quite another story. Socially diverse and rapidly changing, they offer only shifting sands on which to build a personal identity. Left to make many life decisions on their own, many people—especially those with greater wealth—face a bewildering array of options. The freedom to choose has little value without standards to help us make good choices, and in a tolerant mass society, people may find little reason to choose one path over another. As a result, many people shuttle from one identity to another, changing their lifestyles, relationships, and even religions in search of an elusive “true self.” Given the widespread “relativism” of modern societies, people without a moral compass lack the security and certainty once provided by tradition.

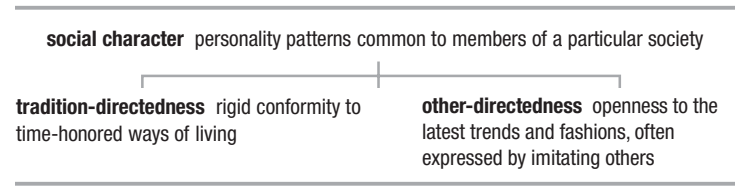
To David Riesman (1970, orig. 1950), modernization brings changes in **social character**, *personality patterns common to members of a particular society*. Preindustrial societies promote what Riesman calls **tradition-directedness**, *rigid conformity to time-honored ways of living*. Members of traditional societies model their lives on those of their ancestors, so that “living a good life” amounts to “doing what our people have always done.”

Tradition-directedness corresponds to Tönnies’s *Gemeinschaft* and Durkheim’s mechanical solidarity. Culturally conservative, tradition-directed people think and act alike. Unlike the conformity sometimes found in modern societies, the uniformity of tradition-directedness is not an effort to imitate a popular celebrity or follow the latest fash-

ions. Instead, people are alike because they all draw on the same solid cultural foundation. Amish women and men exemplify tradition-directedness; in Amish culture, tradition ties everyone to ancestors and descendants in an unbroken chain of righteous living.

Members of diverse and rapidly changing societies consider a tradition-directed personality deviant because it seems so rigid. Modern people, by and large, prize personal flexibility, the capacity to adapt, and sensitivity to others. Riesman calls this type of social character **other-directedness**, *openness to the latest trends and fashions, often expressed by imitating others*. Because their socialization occurs in societies that are continuously in flux, other-directed people develop fluid identities marked by superficiality, inconsistency, and change. They try on different “selves” almost like new clothing, seek out role models, and engage in varied performances as they move from setting to setting (Goffman, 1959). In a traditional society, such “shiftiness” makes a person untrustworthy, but in a changing, modern society, the chameleonlike ability to fit in virtually anywhere is very useful.

In societies that value the up-to-date rather than the traditional, people look to others for approval, using members of their own generation rather than elders as role models. Peer pressure can be irresistible to people without strong standards to guide them. Our society urges individuals to be true to themselves. But when social surroundings change so rapidly, how can people develop the self to which they should be true? This problem lies at the root of the identity crisis so widespread in industrial societies today. “Who am I?” is a nagging question that many of us struggle to answer. In truth, this problem is not so much us as the inherently unstable mass society in which we live.





## Does “Modernity” Mean “Progress”? The Kaiapo of the Amazon and the Gullah of Georgia

The firelight flickers in the gathering darkness. Chief Kanhonk sits cross-legged, as he has done at the end of the day for decades, and gathers his thoughts for an evening of animated storytelling (Simons, 2007). This is the hour when the Kaiapo, a small society in Brazil’s lush Amazon region, celebrate their heritage. Because the Kaiapo are a traditional people with no written language, the elders rely on evenings by the fire to pass on their culture to their children and grandchildren. In the past, evenings like this have been filled with tales of brave Kaiapo warriors fighting off Portuguese traders who were in pursuit of slaves and gold.

But as the minutes pass, only a few older villagers assemble for the evening ritual. “It is the Big Ghost,” one man grumbles, explaining the poor turnout. The “Big Ghost” has indeed descended on them; its bluish glow spills through the windows throughout the village. The Kaiapo children—and many adults as well—are watching sitcoms on television. The installation of a satellite dish in the village several years ago has had consequences far greater than anyone imagined. In the end, what their enemies failed to do with guns, the

Kaiapo may well do to themselves with prime-time programming.

The Kaiapo are among the 230,000 native peoples who inhabit Brazil. They stand out because of their striking body paint and ornate ceremonial dress. During the 1980s, they became rich from gold mining and harvesting mahogany trees. Now they must decide whether their newfound fortune is a blessing or a curse.



To some, affluence means the opportunity to learn about the outside world through travel and television. Others, like Chief Kanhonk, are not so sure. Bathed in the firelight, he thinks aloud: “I have been saying that people must buy useful things like knives and fishing hooks. Television does not fill the stomach. It only shows our children and grandchildren white people’s things.” Bebtopup, the oldest priest, nods in agreement: “The night is the time the old people teach the young people. Television has stolen the night” (Simons, 2007:522).

Far to the north, in the United States, half an hour by ferry from the coast of Georgia, lies the swampy island community of Hog Hammock. The seventy African American residents of the island today trace their ancestry back to the first slaves who settled there in 1802.

Walking past the colorful houses nestled among pine trees draped with Spanish moss, visitors feel transported back in time. The local people, known as Gullahs (or in some places, Geechees), speak *creole*, a mixture of

### Class Society: Problems of Powerlessness

Class-society theory paints a different picture of modernity’s effects on individuals. This approach maintains that persistent social inequality undermines modern society’s promise of individual freedom. For some people, modernity serves up great privilege, but for many, everyday life means coping with economic uncertainty and a growing sense of powerlessness (K. S. Newman, 1993; Ehrenreich, 2001).

For racial and ethnic minorities, the problem of relative disadvantage looms even larger. Similarly, although women participate more broadly in modern societies, they continue to run up against traditional barriers of sexism. This approach rejects mass-society theory’s claim that people suffer from too much freedom. According to class-society theory, our society still denies a majority of people full participation in social life.

As Chapter 12 (“Global Stratification”) explains, the expanding scope of world capitalism has placed more of Earth’s population under the influence of multinational corporations. As a result, more than three-fourths of the world’s income is concentrated in the high-income nations, where just 23 percent of its people live. Is it any wonder, class-society theorists ask, that people in poor nations seek greater power to shape their own lives?

The problem of widespread powerlessness led Herbert Marcuse (1964) to challenge Max Weber’s statement that modern society is rational. Marcuse condemned modern society as irrational for failing to meet the needs of so many people. Although modern capitalist societies produce unparalleled wealth, poverty remains the daily plight of more than 1 billion people. Marcuse adds that technological advances further reduce people’s control over their own lives. High technology gives a great deal of power to a small core of specialists—not the majority of people—who now dominate the discussion of when to go to war, what our energy policy should be, and how people should pay for health care. Countering the common view that technology *solves* the world’s problems, Marcuse believed that science *causes* them. In sum, class-society theory asserts that people suffer because modern societies concentrate knowledge, wealth, and power in the hands of a privileged few.

### Modernity and Progress

In modern societies, most people expect, and applaud, social change. We link modernity to the idea of *progress* (from the Latin, meaning “moving forward”), a state of continual improvement. We see stability as stagnation.



English and West African languages. They fish, living much as they have for hundreds of years in a region that is an important environmental ecosystem (Dewan, 2010).

But the future of this way of life is now in doubt. The young people who grow up in Hog Hammock can find no work other than fishing and making traditional crafts. “We have been here nine generations and we are still here,” says one local. Then, referring to the island’s nineteen children, she adds, “It’s not that they don’t want to be here, it’s that there’s nothing here for them—they need to have jobs” (Curry, 2001:41).

Just as important, with people on the mainland looking for waterside homes for vacations or year-round living, the island has become prime real estate. Not long ago, one of the larger houses went up for sale, and the community was shocked to learn that its asking price was more than \$1 million. The locals know only too well that higher property values will mean high taxes that few can afford to pay. In short, the natural beauty of Hog Hammock is likely to be paved over so that the area becomes another Hilton Head, once a Gullah community on the South Carolina coast that is now home to well-to-do people from the mainland.

The odds are that the people of Hog Hammock will be selling their homes and moving inland. But few people are happy at the thought of selling out, even for a good price. After all,



moving away will mean the end of their cultural heritage.

The stories of both the Kaiapo and the people of Hog Hammock show us that change is not a simple path toward “progress.” These people may be moving toward modernity, but this process will have both positive and negative consequences. In the end, both groups of people may enjoy a higher standard of living with better homes, more schooling, and new technology. But their new affluence will come at the price of their traditions. The drama of these people is now being played out around the world as more and more traditional cultures are being lured away from their heritage by the affluence and materialism of rich societies.

### What Do You Think?

1. Why is social change both a winning and a losing proposition for traditional peoples?
2. Do the changes described here improve the lives of the Kaiapo? What about the Gullah community?
3. Do traditional people have any choice about becoming modern? Explain your answer.

Given our bias in favor of change, our society tends to regard traditional cultures as backward. But change, particularly toward material affluence, is a mixed blessing. As the Thinking Globally box shows, social change is too complex simply to equate with progress.

Even getting rich has both advantages and disadvantages, as the cases of the Kaiapo and the Gullah show. Historically, in the United States, as standard of living rises, people live longer and enjoy more material comforts. At the same time, many people wonder if today’s routines are too stressful, with families often having little time to relax or simply be together. Perhaps this is why, in the United States, even as material prosperity has increased, measures of happiness have not gone up (D. G. Myers, 2000; Inglehart, Welzel, & Foa, 2009).

Science, too, has its pluses and minuses. People in the United States are more confident than people in other nations that science improves our lives (Inglehart et al., 2009). But surveys also show that adults in the United States are divided over the consequences of science, with half pointing to benefits and half claiming that science “makes our way of life change too fast” (NORC, 2011:1762).

New technology has always sparked controversy. A century ago, the introduction of automobiles and telephones allowed more rapid transportation and more efficient communication. But at the same time, such technology weakened traditional attachments to

hometowns and even to families. Today, people might well wonder whether computer technology will do the same thing, giving us access to people around the world but shielding us from the community right outside our doors; providing more information than ever before but in the process threatening personal privacy. In short, we all realize that social change comes faster all the time, but we may disagree about whether a particular change is good or bad for society.

## Modernity: Global Variation

**October 1, Kobe, Japan.** Riding the computer-controlled monorail high above the streets of Kobe or the 200-mile-per-hour bullet train to Tokyo, we see Japan as the society of the future; its people are in love with high technology. But in other ways, the Japanese remain strikingly traditional: Few corporate executives and almost no senior politicians are women, young people still show seniors great respect, and public orderliness contrasts with the relative chaos of many U.S. cities.

Japan is a nation at once traditional and modern. This contradiction reminds us that although it is useful to contrast traditional and modern societies, the old and the new often coexist in unexpected ways. In the People’s Republic of China, ancient Confucian principles are mixed with



Based on everything you have read in this chapter, do you think that, on balance, our society is changing for better or worse? Why?

contemporary socialist thinking. In Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the embrace of modern technology is mixed with respect for the ancient principles of Islam. Likewise, in Mexico and much of Latin America, people observe centuries-old Christian rituals even as they struggle to move ahead economically. In short, combinations of traditional and modern are far from unusual; rather, they are found throughout the world.

## Postmodernity

### Understand

If modernity was the product of the Industrial Revolution, is the Information Revolution creating a postmodern era? A number of scholars think so, and they use the term **postmodernity** to refer to *social patterns characteristic of postindustrial societies*.

The term *postmodernism* has been used for decades in literary, philosophical, and even architectural circles. It moved into sociology on a wave of social criticism that has been building since the spread of left-leaning politics in the 1960s. Although there are many variants of postmodern thinking, all share the following five themes (Hall & Neitz, 1993; Inglehart, 1997; Rudel & Gerson, 1999):

- 1. In important respects, modernity has failed.** The promise of modernity was a life free from want. As postmodernist critics see it, however, the twentieth century was unsuccessful in solving social problems like poverty. This fact is evident in today's high poverty rates, as well as the widespread sense of financial insecurity.
- 2. The bright light of "progress" is fading.** Modern people look to the future, expecting that their lives will improve in significant ways. Members (and even leaders) of postmodern societies, however, are less confident about what the future holds. The strong optimism that carried society into the modern era more than a

century ago has given way to widespread pessimism; almost half of U.S. adults do not expect their children's lives to be better than their own (NORC, 2011:370, 392).

- 3. Science no longer holds the answers.** The defining trait of the modern era was a scientific outlook and a confident belief that technology would make life better. But postmodern critics argue that science has not solved many old problems (such as poor health) and has even created new problems (such as pollution and global warming).

Postmodernist thinkers discredit science, claiming that it implies a singular truth. On the contrary, they maintain, different people see different "realities," and there are many ways to socially construct the world.

- 4. Cultural debates are intensifying.** Now that more people have all the material things they really need, ideas are taking on more importance. In this sense, postmodernity is also a postmaterialist era, in which more careers involve working with symbols and in which issues such as social justice, the state of the natural environment, and animal rights command more and more public attention.

- 5. Social institutions are changing.** Just as industrialization brought a sweeping transformation to social institutions, the rise of a postindustrial society is remaking society again. For example, the postmodern family no longer conforms to any single pattern; on the contrary, individuals are choosing among many new family forms.

**Evaluate** Analysts who claim that the United States and other high-income societies are entering a postmodern era criticize modernity for failing to meet human needs. In defense of modernity, there have been marked increases in longevity and living standards over the course of the past century. Even if we accept postmodernist views that science is bankrupt and progress is a sham, what are the alternatives?

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** In your own words, state the characteristics of a postmodern society.

Is society getting better or not? The Sociology in Focus box offers evidence suggesting that life in the United States is getting better in some ways but not in others.

## Looking Ahead: Modernization and Our Global Future

### Evaluate

Back in Chapter 1 (see page 8), we imagined the entire world reduced to a village of 1,000 people. About 200 residents of this "global village" come from high-income countries. Another 130 people are so poor that their lives are at risk.





**FLORENCE:** I think life is great! Don't you?

**SAMANTHA:** I guess it depends on what you are referring to.

**FLORENCE:** Hey, I'm feeling good, and you want to make everything complicated!

**SAMANTHA:** Well, sorry to sound like a sociology major, but life is complicated. In some ways life is getting better; in other ways, it's not. . . .

We began this chapter with a look at what life was like in a large U.S. city in 1900, more than a century ago. It is easy to see that in many ways, life is far better for us today than it was for our grandparents and great-grandparents. In recent decades, however, not all indicators have been good. Here is a look at some trends shaping the United States since 1970 (Miringoff & Miringoff, 1999; D. G. Myers, 2000; Gibbs, 2009; Inglehart, Welzel, & Foa, 2009).

First, the good news: By some measures, life in this country is clearly improving. Televisions get hundreds of channels, not just three or four. Cars have much more power, run much cleaner, and there are more of them. Infant mortality has been falling steadily, meaning that fewer and fewer children die soon after birth. In addition, an increasing share of our society's people is reaching old age, and after reaching sixty-five, they are living longer than ever. More good news: The poverty rate among the elderly is well below what it was in 1970. Schooling is another area of improvement: The share of people dropping out of high school is down, and

the share completing a college education is up. Even alcohol-related traffic deaths on the highways are down to about half of what they were in 1980.

Next, a number of indicators show that life is about the same as it was in the 1970s. For example, teenage drug use is about the same now as it was a generation earlier. Unemployment has been way up in the past year or two, but over the past three decades the overall level has stayed about the same. There is about the same amount of affordable housing in the United States now as there was in 1970. Across the last century, survey research finds that people do not report being any happier.



Research shows that people in the United States today are better off economically than past generations. At the same time, there has been no long-term increase in measures of personal happiness. How can you explain this contradiction?

Then there is the bad news. By some measures, several having to do with children, the quality of life in the United States has actually fallen. The official rate of child abuse is up, as is the rate of suicide among young people. Although the level of violent crime has fallen over the past fifteen years, it remains higher than it was in 1970. Average hourly wages, one measure of economic security, show a downward trend, meaning that more families today have to rely on two or more earners to maintain family income. As far as jobs and income are concerned, people's confidence in the future is not as great as it used to be. The number of people without health insurance has also been on the rise. In addition, economic inequality in this country—the gap between the rich and the poor—has been increasing.

Overall, the evidence does not support any simple ideas about “progress over time.” Social change has been and will continue to be a complex process that reflects the kinds of priorities we set for this nation as well as our will to achieve them.

### Join the Blog!

Do you think the quality of life in the United States is improving or not? Do you feel that your generation will live better than your parents' generation? Explain. Go to MySocLab and join the Sociology in Focus blog to share your opinions and experiences and to see what others think.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2010).

The tragic plight of the world's poor shows that the planet is in desperate need of change. Chapter 12 (“Global Stratification”) presented two competing views of why more than 1 billion people around the world are so poor. *Modernization theory* claims that in the past, the entire world was poor and that technological change, especially the Industrial Revolution, enhanced human productivity and raised living standards in many nations. From this point of view, the solution to global poverty is to promote technological development and market economies around the world.

For reasons suggested earlier, however, global modernization may be difficult. Recall that David Riesman portrayed preindustrial people as *tradition-directed* and likely to resist change. So modern-

ization theorists advocate that the world's rich societies help poor countries grow economically. Industrial nations can speed development by exporting technology to poor regions, welcoming students from these countries, and providing foreign aid to stimulate economic growth.

The review of modernization theory in Chapter 12 points to some success with policies in Latin America and to greater success in the small Asian countries of Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, and Hong Kong (since 1997 part of the People's Republic of China). But jump-starting development in the poorest countries of the world poses greater challenges. And even where dramatic change has occurred, modernization involves a trade-off. Traditional people, such



# Personal Freedom and Social Responsibility: Can We Have It Both Ways?

**SAMUEL:** I feel that being free is the most important thing. Let me do what I want!

**SANJI:** But if everyone felt that way, what would the world be like?

**DOREEN:** Isn't there a way to be true to ourselves and also take account of other people?

One issue we all have to work out is making decisions that take account of other people. But what, exactly, do we owe others? To see the problem, consider an event that took place in New York City in 1964.

Shortly after midnight on a crisp March evening, Kitty Genovese drove into the parking lot of her apartment complex. She turned off the engine, locked the doors of her vehicle, and headed across the blacktop toward the entrance to her building. Out of nowhere, a man holding a knife lunged at her, and as she screamed in terror and pain, he stabbed her repeatedly. Windows opened above as curious neighbors looked down to see

what was going on. But the attack continued for more than thirty minutes until Genovese lay dead in the doorway. The police never identified her killer,

and their investigation revealed a stunning fact: *Not one* of the dozens of neighbors who witnessed the attack on Kitty Genovese went to her aid or even called the police.

Decades after this tragic event, we still confront the question of what we owe others. We prize our individual rights and personal privacy, but sometimes we turn a cold shoulder to people in need. When a cry for help is met with indifference, have we pushed our modern idea of personal freedom too far? In a society of expanding individual rights, can we keep a sense of human community?

These questions highlight the tension between traditional and modern social systems, which we can see in the writings of all the sociologists discussed in this chapter. Tönnies, Durkheim, and others concluded that in some respects, traditional community and modern individualism don't mix. That is, society can unite its members in a moral community only by limiting their range of personal choices about how to live. In short, although we



In today's world, people can find new ways to express age-old virtues such as extending a helping hand to their neighbors in need. One way that college students in campuses across the country find to lend a hand is by participating in Habitat for Humanity projects. Are there opportunities for you to get involved in your own community?

as Brazil's Kaiapo, may gain wealth through economic development, but they lose their cultural identity and values as they are drawn into a global "McCulture" based on Western materialism, pop music, trendy clothes, and fast food. One Brazilian anthropologist expressed hope about the future of the Kaiapo: "At least they quickly understood the consequences of watching television. . . . Now [they] can make a choice" (Simons, 2007:523).

But not everyone thinks that modernization is really an option. According to a second approach to global stratification, *dependency theory*, today's poor societies have little ability to modernize, even if

they want to. From this point of view, the major barrier to economic development is not traditionalism but global domination by rich capitalist societies.

Dependency theory asserts that rich nations achieved modernization at the expense of poor ones, by taking poor nations' natural resources and exploiting their human labor. Even today, the world's poorest countries remain locked in a disadvantageous economic relationship with rich nations, dependent on wealthy countries to buy their raw materials and in return provide them with whatever manufactured products they can afford. According to this view, contin-



value both community and freedom, we can't have it both ways.

The sociologist Amitai Etzioni (1993, 1996, 2003) has tried to strike a middle ground. The *communitarian movement* rests on the simple idea that with rights must come responsibilities. Put another way, our pursuit of self-interest must be balanced by a commitment to the larger community.

Etzioni claims that modern people have become too concerned about individual rights. We expect the system to work for us, but we are reluctant to support the system. For example, we believe that people accused of a crime have the right to their day in court, but fewer and fewer of us are willing to perform jury duty; similarly, we are quick to accept government services but resent having to support these services with our taxes.

The communitarians advance four proposals to balance individual rights and public responsibilities. First, our society should halt the expanding "culture of rights" by which we put our own interests ahead of social responsibility. The U.S. Constitution, which is quoted so often when discussing individual rights, does not guarantee us the right

to do whatever we want. Second, we must remember that all rights involve responsibilities; for society to work, we must all play a part. Third, the well-being of everyone may require limiting our individual rights; for example, pilots and bus drivers who are responsible for public safety may be asked to take drug tests. Fourth, no one can ignore key responsibilities such as upholding the law and responding to a cry for help from someone like Kitty Genovese.

The communitarian movement appeals to many people who believe in both personal freedom and social responsibility. But Etzioni's proposals have drawn criticism from both sides of the political spectrum. To those on the left, serious problems ranging from voter apathy and street crime to disappearing pensions and millions of workers without medical care cannot be solved with some vague notion of "social responsibility." As they see it, what we need is expanded government programs to protect people and lessen inequality.

Conservatives, on the political right, see different problems in Etzioni's proposals (Pearson, 1995). As they see it, the communitarian movement favors

liberal goals, such as confronting prejudice and protecting the environment, but ignores conservative goals such as strengthening religious belief and supporting traditional families.

Etzioni responds that the criticism coming from both sides suggests that he has found a moderate, sensible answer to a serious problem. But the debate may also indicate that in a society as diverse as the United States, people who are so quick to assert their rights are not so quick to agree on their responsibilities.

### What Do You Think?

1. Have you ever failed to come to the aid of someone in need or danger? Why?
2. Half a century ago, President John F. Kennedy stated, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." Do you think that people today support this idea? Why or why not?
3. Are you willing to serve on a jury? Do you mind paying your fair share of taxes? Would you be willing to perform a year of national service after you graduate from college? Explain your answers.

uing ties with rich societies only perpetuates current patterns of global inequality.

Whichever approach you find more convincing, keep in mind that change in the United States is no longer separate from change in the rest of the world. At the beginning of the twentieth century, most people in today's high-income countries lived in relatively small settlements with limited awareness of the larger world. Today, the world has become one huge village because the lives of all people are increasingly interconnected.

The twentieth century witnessed unprecedented human achievement. Yet solutions to many problems of human existence—including

finding meaning in life, resolving conflicts between nations, and eliminating poverty—have eluded us. The Controversy & Debate box examines one dilemma: balancing individual freedom and personal responsibility. To this list of pressing matters have been added new concerns, such as controlling population growth and establishing an environmentally sustainable society. In the coming years, we must be prepared to tackle such problems with imagination, compassion, and determination. Our growing understanding of human society gives us reason to be hopeful that we can get the job done.

# Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life

## CHAPTER 24 Social Change: Traditional, Modern, and Postmodern Societies

### Is tradition the opposite of modernity?

Conceptually, this may be true. But as this chapter explains, traditional and modern social patterns combine in all sorts of interesting ways in our everyday lives. Look at the photographs below, and identify elements of tradition and modernity. Do they seem to go together, or are they in conflict? Why?

**HINT** Although sociologists analyze tradition and modernity as conceptual opposites, every society combines these elements in various ways. People may debate the virtues of traditional and modern life, but the two patterns are found almost everywhere. Technological change always has social consequences—for example, the use of cell phones changes people's social networks and economic opportunities; similarly, the spread of McDonald's changes not only what people eat but also where and with whom they share meals.

These young girls live in the city of Istanbul in Turkey, a country that has long debated the merits of traditional and modern life. What sets off traditional and modern ways of dressing? Do you think such differences are likely to affect patterns of friendship? Would the same be true in the United States?







When the first McDonald's restaurant opened in the city of Kiev in Ukraine, many people stopped by to taste a hamburger and see what "fast food" was all about. As large corporations expand their operations around the world, do they tip the balance away from tradition in favor of modernity? If so, how?

In Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, these young men are shopping for the latest in cell phones. Does such modern technology threaten a society's traditions?



## Seeing Sociology in *Your* Everyday Life

1. How do tradition and modernity combine in your life? Point to several ways in which you are traditional and several ways in which you are thoroughly modern.
2. Ask people in your class or friendship group to make five predictions about U.S. society in the year 2060, when today's twenty-year-olds will be senior citizens. Compare notes. On what issues is there agreement?
3. What do you see as the advantages of living in a modern society? What are the drawbacks? Go to the "Seeing Sociology in *Your* Everyday Life" feature on mysoclab.com to learn more about the benefits and challenges of modern living—information you can use to enhance your own life.

## What Is Social Change?

**Social change** is the transformation of culture and social institutions over time. Every society changes all the time, sometimes faster, sometimes more slowly. Social change often generates controversy. **pp. 564–65**

**social change** (p. 565) the transformation of culture and social institutions over time



## Causes of Social Change

### Culture

- *Invention* produces new objects, ideas, and social patterns.
- *Discovery* occurs when people take notice of existing elements of the world.
- *Diffusion* creates change as products, people, and information spread from one society to another. **pp. 565–66**

### Social Conflict

- Karl Marx claimed that class conflict between capitalists and workers pushes society toward a socialist system of production.
- Social conflict arising from class, race, and gender inequality has resulted in social changes that have improved the lives of working people. **p. 566**

### Ideas

Max Weber traced the roots of most social changes to ideas:

- The fact that industrial capitalism developed first in areas of Western Europe where the Protestant work ethic was strong demonstrates the power of ideas to bring about change. **p. 566**

### Demographic Factors

Population patterns play a part in social change:

- The aging of U.S. society has resulted in changes to family life and the development of consumer products to meet the needs of the elderly.
- Migration within and between societies promotes change. **p. 566**

✦ [Explore the Map on mysoclab.com](#)

## Modernity

**Modernity** refers to the social consequences of industrialization, which include

- the decline of traditional communities
- the expansion of personal choice
- increasing social diversity
- focus on the future **pp. 566–68**

**Ferdinand Tönnies** described modernization as the transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, a process characterized by the loss of traditional community and the rise of individualism. **pp. 568–69**

📖 [Read the Document on mysoclab.com](#)

**Emile Durkheim** saw modernization as a society's expanding division of labor. *Mechanical solidarity*, based on shared activities and beliefs, is gradually replaced by *organic solidarity*, in which specialization makes people interdependent. **p. 569**

**Max Weber** saw modernity as the decline of a traditional worldview and the rise of rationality. Weber feared the dehumanizing effects of modern rational organization. **pp. 569–70**

**Karl Marx** saw modernity as the triumph of capitalism over feudalism. Capitalism creates social conflict, which Marx claimed would bring about revolutionary change leading to an egalitarian socialist society. **pp. 570–71**

**modernity** (p. 566) social patterns resulting from industrialization

**modernization** (p. 566) the process of social change begun by industrialization

**division of labor** (p. 569) specialized economic activity

**anomie** (p. 569) Durkheim's term for a condition in which society provides little moral guidance to individuals





## Theories of Modernity

### Structural-Functional Theory: Modernity as Mass Society

- According to **mass-society theory**, modernity increases the scale of life, enlarging the role of government and other formal organizations in carrying out tasks previously performed by families in local communities.
- Cultural diversity and rapid social change make it difficult for people in modern societies to develop stable identities and to find meaning in their lives. **pp. 571–73**

### Social-Conflict Theory: Modernity as Class Society

- According to **class-society theory**, modernity involves the rise of capitalism into a global economic system resulting in persistent social inequality.
- By concentrating wealth in the hands of a few, modern capitalist societies generate widespread feelings of alienation and powerlessness. **pp. 573–74**

 Watch the Video on [mysoclab.com](https://mysoclab.com)

### Modernity and the Individual

Both mass-society theory and class-society theory are macro-level approaches; from them, however, we can also draw micro-level insights into how modernity shapes individual lives.

### Mass Society: Problems of Identity

- Mass-society theory suggests that the great social diversity, widespread isolation, and rapid social change of modern societies make it difficult for individuals to establish a stable social identity.

David Riesman described the changes in social character that modernity causes:

- Preindustrial societies exhibit **tradition-directedness**: Everyone in society draws on the same solid cultural foundation, and people model their lives on those of their ancestors.
- Modern societies exhibit **other-directedness**: Because their socialization occurs in societies that are continuously in flux, other-directed people develop fluid identities marked by superficiality, inconsistency, and change. **pp. 574–75**

### Class Society: Problems of Powerlessness

- Class-society theory claims that the problem facing most people today is economic uncertainty and powerlessness.
- Herbert Marcuse claimed that modern society is irrational because it fails to meet the needs of so many people.
- Marcuse also believed that technological advances further reduce people's control over their own lives.
- People suffer because modern societies have concentrated both wealth and power in the hands of a privileged few. **p. 576**

**mass society** (p. 571) a society in which prosperity and bureaucracy have weakened traditional social ties

**class society** (p. 573) a capitalist society with pronounced social stratification

**social character** (p. 575) personality patterns common to members of a particular society

**tradition-directedness** (p. 575) rigid conformity to time-honored ways of living

**other-directedness** (p. 575) openness to the latest trends and fashions, often expressed by imitating others



## Modernity and Progress

Social change is too complex and controversial simply to be equated with progress:

- A rising standard of living has made lives longer and materially more comfortable; at the same time, many people are stressed and have little time to relax with their families; there have been no increases in measures of personal happiness over recent decades.
- Science and technology have brought many conveniences to our everyday lives, yet many people are concerned that life is changing too fast; the introduction of automobiles and advanced communications technology has weakened traditional attachments to hometowns and even to families. **pp. 576–77**

## Postmodernity

**Postmodernity** refers to the cultural traits of postindustrial societies. Postmodern criticism of society centers on the failure of modernity, and specifically science, to fulfill its promise of prosperity and well-being. **p. 578**

**postmodernity** (p. 578) social patterns characteristic of postindustrial societies

## Looking Ahead: Modernization and Our Global Future

*Modernization theory* links global poverty to the power of tradition. Rich nations can help poor countries develop their economies.

*Dependency theory* explains global poverty as the product of the world economic system. The operation of multinational corporations makes poor nations economically dependent on rich nations.

**pp. 578–81**