

Preface to the 4th Edition

THINK CRITICALLY & STEP OUTSIDE YOUR COMFORT ZONE

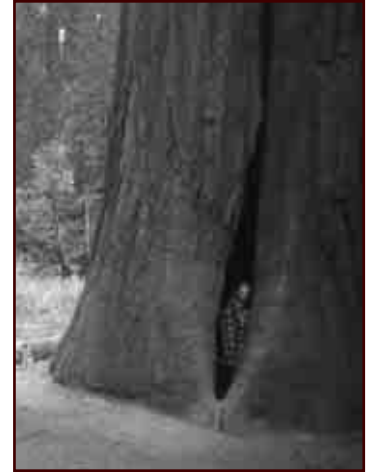
by Akil Kokayi Khalfani, Ph.D.

Before you start your first assignment in this class, think about why you are here at this college, at this time and place in your life. Now, close your eyes and let's take a journey. You are standing a half a mile from a beautiful pine forest. From this distance it looks like the average American forest. As you get closer you notice something different, the trees are enormous. You are now standing next to a 100- to 300-foot tall tree. This is a giant redwood forest. Certain species of redwood trees grow over 300 feet tall and over 30 feet in diameter at the base. This is what I encountered in my visit to Yosemite National Park, in California as a youth. Such incredible trees crystallize the notion of not being able to see the forest for the trees. These trees are some of the largest living things on Earth. If you have not seen them in person, you may have to stretch your thinking to imagine what it is like to stand in this forest filled with hundreds of these trees.

As you embark upon this semester, reflect on this concept. Think back every now and then to the forest you envisioned and go to the U.S. Department of Agriculture—Forest Service website <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/sequoia/>. In the photo gallery you will see redwood trees. Afterwards, begin to think outside the box as you examine our world from a sociological perspective. We all need to step back from the giant redwood trees of life so that we can see the forest. That is, we need to see the world from a perspective that is greater than our personal experience. Doing so enables us to develop a better understanding of our relationship to other societies and peoples locally

and globally. It also empowers us to think broadly about liberty, equality, and justice; as well as more critically about social processes, patterns, problems and their solutions.

The first time I saw and touched a giant redwood tree, I began to grasp how small I am in this complex world, but I also began to understand that you cannot appreciate the magnificence and height of a 300-foot tree if you are standing next to it. If you are standing close to a 300-foot tree, it does not look much taller than a 200-foot tree, but when you step back to see the forest, the giant tree towers everything else in sight. Similarly, when standing next to the Empire State Building in New York, it does not look much taller than its neighboring buildings, but looking at it from a great distance or looking down at the other buildings from the top of the Empire State Building, you can appreciate just how tall it truly is. I challenge you to keep this concept in mind as you go through the semester. Release your personal biases and beliefs about society, different groups, and different cultures for a brief moment. Step outside of your comfort zone as you go on a journey with your professor and classmates to analyze our social world from a new lens.



Man standing inside a damaged giant redwood tree. (U.S. Department of Agriculture—Forest Service <http://www.fs.fed.us/>)

Let this journey open your eyes to a different way of thinking about your social world so that you can be a changing force in the world.

Hotep (Peace),
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Dr. Khalfani has a Ph.D. and a Masters degree in Sociology from the University of Pennsylvania, from which he also earned a Certificate in African Studies. Additionally, he studied in South Africa at the University of Pretoria.

He grew up in South Central Los Angeles and now lives in Northern New Jersey with his wife and four children.



Photo Credit: Akil & Sia Khalfani—
Jakada Khalfani 2007

Preface to the 2nd Edition

Our purpose in writing this text is to convey both the excitement of sociology and its relevance to our lives. The excitement of sociology comes from what it studies: social life and social organization. Sociology encompasses all aspects of society: family life, community change, individual development, group differences, and gender inequality, to name a few. It involves a unique way of looking at the world in which we live, forcing us to question the obvious and understand how society and behavior are patterned and organized. People are discovering that sociology provides them with unique skills and abilities in research methods, in applying social theory in the working world, and in using their understanding of social processes, organization, and change.

SUPPLEMENTS

We have assembled the following supplements to support *Understanding Sociology*.

1. *Study Guide*. A thorough and practical student study guide that includes learning objectives, chapter outlines, questions, and ideas that help the student review the material presented in this text. Also included are student activities and projects designed to enhance the practical application of sociological concepts.

2. *Instructor's Manual*. A comprehensive manual provides a wealth of teaching suggestions, objectives and resources, outside activities stressing the importance of sociology to personal lives, suggested readings from short stories and novels, a guide to films, and much more.

3. *Test Bank*. An extensive test bank of approximately 2,100 questions is available to instructors in

both hard copy and electronic forms. Each chapter consists of a variety of multiple choice, short answer and essay questions. Each question is referenced to the appropriate text page to make verification quick and easy.

4. *PowerPoints*. A set of PowerPoint slides is available to adopters. The set includes charts, tables, and graphs from the text and additional charts and graphs from other sources.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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