PREFACE

For ten days in January 1969, the Union Oil Company's Platform A spilled an estimated 3.25 million gallons of thick crude oil into the Santa Barbara Channel on the coast of Southern California. By mid-May, the slick had covered virtually the entire city coastline, as well as most of the coastlines of Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties (Scheffer, 1991). This event became a lightning rod and turning point in environmental policy and activism in the United States (Dowie, 1995). In trying to understand the policy issues in this environmental disaster—how it happened, how it was resolved, and with what consequences—we could focus on many dimensions. We could assess the toxicity of the crude oil that was leaked; the ecological damage the oil imposed on fish and plant species along the fragile coastline; the economic impact of this ecological damage on the tourism industry that had become the economic base of the region; the political interests at work in mobilizing resources for the cleanup, or other similarly important concerns. These are well-debated topics, structured as analytic problems by technical, legal, and economic approaches to environmental policy issues.

But standard approaches in policy studies often neglect the organizational component. They give explanatory primacy to malfunctions in technological systems while focusing less on the complex, contingent organizational processes at play (Beamish, 2001; Perrow, 1984; Vaughan, 1996). They focus on the aggregate of political interests as decision drivers rather than on the decision processes distributed across complex social fields and bureaucratic arrangements (Espeland, 1998). They seek the sources of accountability in the intentional and interested actions of individual firms or agencies, with less regard to the contributing sources

of standard organizational practices, industry-level beliefs, or the guiding legacy of regulatory models (such as "command and control").

The case of the Santa Barbara oil spill is instructive for exploring organizational issues. Molotch (1970) uses this case to move away from technological and economic accounts to understand why this oil spill, rather than one of the many other (and larger) spills that had occurred worldwide, garnered such national attention. Like Molotch, we are making socially, politically, and institutionally based arguments to understand environmental problems and solutions. But we consider the *field-level processes* by which *collective rationalities* shape meaning and action around the enactment of an event like this. We use the term "field-level" activities to describe organizational and institutional dynamics in order to emphasize the level of analysis and types of processes involved. Molotch, for example, argued that to understand the Santa Barbara oil spill we need to begin with a focus on the social class and status of the residents of Santa Barbara. In his study, political interests, class resources, and social networks account for why such an unusually high level of field-level debate occurred and then turned into policy action of equally unusual speed and scope. The Nixon administration imposed a moratorium on California offshore development, temporarily shutting it down. Cleanup efforts were impressively extensive for their day. And the legacy of this spill continues thirty years later, fueling opposition to proposed drilling in the potentially lucrative reserves of the Alaskan tundra (Yergin, 1991). In the end, more than oil leaked from Union Oil's Platform: "a bit of truth about power in America spilled out along with it" (Molotch, 1970: 131).

We propose the intertwining of social and political processes with technical and economic dynamics as a preferred research stance. As such, the intended audience for this book is twofold, reflecting both a theoretical and empirical focus. One set of readers at whom the book is directed are organizational and management scholars working within the tradition of the institutional analysis of organizations and policy. The others are environmental scholars interested in management and policy. Providing a useful synthesis of theory and empirical setting that is novel to both sets of readers, the studies in this volume apply a set of analytic lenses grounded in field-level organization and institutional approaches as they probe for answers to how environmental policy and practices get shaped, are spread, are contested, and have consequences. Similarly, we see the interplay of organizations, policy, and the natural environment as a critical empirical domain for understanding central paradoxes in policy studies, sharpening the analytic insights of recent institutional and strategic theories of organizations, and building awareness about the interface of the social and natural environments. Situated at this inter-

section, the chapters in this volume contribute to discussion about how organizational approaches to environmental issues can inform key research concerns such as the sources of organization-level policies and practices, the dynamics of policy systems and wider organizational fields, and the institutional framing of the natural environment and its interplay within society and specific industrial sectors.

To date, the research insights of the organizational sciences are little evident in the policy study of environmental issues. This absence is the focus of several recent challenges by senior scholars. Gladwin (1993) called attention to this missing contribution by calling for an application of organizational theory to the study of corporate environmental management. He argued that "sociological theory pertaining to organizations holds the greatest promise for improving our understanding of how greening works . . . [because they focus] on basic characteristics of organizational participants, goals, social structure, technology and external environment, at different levels of analysis" (p. 47). Where Gladwin sought to provoke contributions from outside the field, Stern and Barley (1996) directed an internal challenge to research colleagues, arguing for an engagement of classic concerns from organizational theory to issues of broad social relevance, such as the environment. They argued that most academic contributions to such issues presently come from the disciplines of economics and law. But these disciplines focus narrowly on overly rational conceptions and coercive mechanisms for identifying and solving key issues of public concern, approaches that neglect systemic organizational contexts that establish parameters for individual choice and action.

This book is an answer to the call of such scholars. The chapters discuss a variety of environmental issues and report evidence on the dynamics of social structure and organizational processes in identifying, shaping, and resolving them.

A focus on organizational processes leads to new types of questions and analytical concerns regarding previously addressed environmental issues. For example, why did the Love Canal disaster of 1978 become a national emergency—ultimately precipitating the legislation of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA) or Superfund law—and not any of the other 10,000 hazardous waste dumpsites across America? Love Canal was a catastrophe, but it wasn't the worst hazardous waste site in the country, in New York State, or even in Niagara County (Keating and Russell, 1992). Why do we devote such enormous attention and money to cleaning up hazardous waste sites when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's own internal technical studies show that other issues such as ground-level radon and acid rain present greater threats to human health and the environment? Why have corporations begun to develop formal mechanisms at the firm- and industry-levels for self-enforcement on certain envi-

ronmental issues even when government has yet to act? Why have global problems such as ozone depletion and global climate change displaced more local problems such as groundwater contamination and urban waste disposal as priorities for governments, the press, and the mainstream environmental movement?

These form an important category of questions for understanding the full dimensions of environmental problems and solutions. Although the immediate answers to such questions are generally local and technological, more basic issues lie in the cultural and institutional context of environmental decision making. Rather than asking about the technical sources of environmental pollution, we need to ask how environmental problems are conceived and framed. This line of questioning will lead to further questions about why environmental problems persist and, more important, how solutions are fashioned in response. This will lead us to questions of values, norms, politics, and power. And to probe at this level of analysis, we need to consider the different constituencies that have a stake in particular environmental problems and the domains in which they interact. This is an area that is gaining increasing attention from scholars focused on environmental issues within the fields of management, sociology, policy, and political science (Buttel, 1987; Hannigan, 1995; Shrivastava, 1995; MacNaughten and Urry, 1998; Becker and Jahn, 1999; Starik and Marcus, 2000).

Varied in theoretical and empirical approach, the chapters in this volume emphasize five themes. The *first* is the focus on organizational structures and actions in relation to the natural environment. But more than focusing on any single organization in isolation, these studies develop arguments about how field-level distributions of resources and meanings guide collective understanding and beliefs about the nature of environmental problems and their solutions. The focus is on political and institutional mechanisms and empirical studies that feature attention to local, organizational, national, and global processes. The *second* is the inclusion of the natural environment as a "participant" in field-level policy processes, a critical and distinct element in institutional analyses. The presence and influence of the natural environment in this way poses novel kinds of practical and theoretical research issues for organizational studies. The chapters deal with these issues in ways that help define new research directions. The *third* is the theoretical application of organizational studies to the empirical domain of environmental issues as generative for both organization theory and environmental studies. Our goal is to bring together theory and research that charts a distinctive analytic point of view regarding the complex analytical and practical tasks in the study of environmental policy and corporate environmental action. The *fourth* is the commitment to ground studies of environmental policy in rigorous, empirical, and disciplinary research,

a clear statement about the value of basic organization and social science research studies on complicated, contested contemporary issues. This can help counter the appearance to some that studies in this domain are "advocacy."

The *fifth* and final theme is that the research reported in this book treats institutions and organizations as a relevant level of analysis for these types of issues. For although technological and economic activity may be proximate factors in environmentally destructive behavior, the chapters focus on the sources and structure of collective rationality, framing processes, and social and political institutions that embed those technical and economic factors (Bazerman and Hoffman, 1999; Dacin, Ventresca, and Beal; 1999; Hirsch, 1986). Our critical questions are not about technology per se, but about how organizational and institutional processes shape its development, interpret its impact on the natural environment, and enact organizational and institutional changes to resolve it. We use the research in this book as a basis to develop an argument for studies based on analytic attention to field-level processes and organizational mechanisms.

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