

PREFACE

THIS BOOK HAS TAKEN A LONG TIME TO CONCEIVE, research, and write, and the difficulties I encountered in producing it say as much about our intellectual context as they do about the nature of the subject matter. I am an academician formally trained in the discipline of sociology, but this is not merely a sociological book. It was influenced as much by political science, history, anthropology, philosophy, psychology, conflict resolution, and a variety of other truncated approaches to knowledge that fall under the broad label of humanities and social science. I hope it draws on the craftsmanship of sociological thinking, while appealing to the broad community of engaged thinkers who have much more to say to one another than they are comfortable to admit or demonstrate. I wrote the book as I thought a good book ought to be written, with rigorous, reliable, and reproducible attachment to the data while maintaining only loose affiliation with any of the many discursive communities in which I have traveled (and there have been quite a few). Therefore, if this book seems to speak to your subspecialty or disciplinary niche, it does. Read and run with it. As many have tried to convince me along the way, I think there is something of a methodology revealed in the project, but I will make no fetish of it other than to say that good history, like good television and good conversation, makes for good sociology.

Among the findings of the book are the silences of concerns not covered in it. So many of the issues that matter to you do not matter enough to our national elites for them to spend much time debating them on *Meet the Press*—which means they are marginalized in our democratic debate.

If you don't find your interests reflected in these pages, do something about it! Our national leaders all had a hand in writing this book by providing its subject matter in regular intervals. If you wish that right now you were reading a book about other, more pressing subjects, I suggest you take it up with your congressperson.