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The Personal Experience of Social Change

I f you could use only six words, how would you describe your life? F. Scott Fitzgerald, author of *The Great Gatsby*, wistfully suggested that he and his wife, Zelda, would write, "For Sale: baby shoes, never worn." One of my former students, Joe Hampton, penned, "No plan. Hope it works out." Trying to compose a phrase that captures or summarizes a life is a challenge.[1] Life is long (we hope) and full of twists and turns. As the German philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote, "From the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing can ever be made." Our plans, sacrifices, character, perseverance, and common sense take us where we want to go, but the road was not built by us, nor do we have control over the traffic lights and detours.[2] That is why, in part, the study of society and the effort to understand social life is so important.

We live in a world that could easily go about its business without us, and we leave the world with surprisingly little consequence, especially given all

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[1] To read more six-word epigrams, see Rachel Fershleiser and Larry Smith's *Not Quite What I Was Planning*.

[2] "And so the nature of not only politics but, I think, social change of any sort is that it doesn't move in a straight line, and that those who are most successful typically are tacking like a sailor toward a particular direction but have to take into account winds and currents and occasionally the lack of any wind, so that you're just sitting there for awhile, and sometimes you're being blown all over the place," is how President Barack Obama described social change with a nautical metaphor (Remnick 2014: 52).

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the effort we expend to become who we are. Whenever I arrive at a faraway destination, my first thought is that life there would be absolutely the same if I had missed my flight. With taxis whizzing by, church bells ringing, school children rushing down the street, people in shops looking over things to buy, friends embracing, I think, "I might as well be a ghost," until I hear someone at my shoulder asking if they can help me.

This is the mystery and marvel of studying social change. The human world in all its political, economic, cultural, biological, linguistic, and demographic complexity has been constructed over thousands of years and remains a work in progress. In that time, human beings for several thousands of generations have been born, lived and died. They are long forgotten by history. Still, they did have their moment, and the world would be slightly different had they not lived. In their totality, there would be no social world, no culture, no economy, no political system, no war, and no religion if these seemingly insignificant and nameless millions had not lived.

Jesus Christ, Mohammed, Buddha, Zoroaster, and Confucius? What about Genghis Kahn, Nefertiti, Napoleon, Adolf Hitler, and Mao Zedong? Add to that Socrates, Aristotle, Cleopatra, Leonardo da Vinci, Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud, Pablo Picasso, Igor Stravinsky, and Mohandas Gandhi? Who would we be without Abraham Lincoln, Albert Einstein, and Martin Luther King Jr.? These people and many, many others left a larger footprint than will most of us. In very significant ways they changed how we experience, think about, and see the world. Their visions and efforts visibly altered social and material life, science, law, religious thought, the arts, economics, war and peace.

True enough, but they did so not alone and not only by dint of their brilliance, ego, creativity, and determination. The changes we attach to these individuals can only be understood by taking a more inclusive, expansive view of the social world. They lived in a particular time and place in which their efforts could be monumental because their ideas and deeds resonated with thousands of others to disrupt the taken-for-granted order of things and channel human endeavors in new directions. It is in the recognition of the dynamic confluence of personal efforts and the social milieu, biography and history, the private and the public that we can understand social change.[3]

A Twentieth-Century Life: Iris Summers

Iris Summers was no one special. She lived a very normal life for her times, but the times changed greatly, and in many ways Iris changed with them. She

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[3]The work of C. Wright Mills guides the perspective that seeks to locate private issues in public history—what he described as "the sociological imagination" (Mills 1959).

sometimes thought longingly about "how things used to be"—both the good things and the bad—and was never eager to embrace a fad or whatever was in vogue. Iris didn't fear the future, though, and gradually and without much thought kept up with the social changes around her. She was careful with her money (what little she had) as a way of preparing for the future that would inevitably include small setbacks. She believed that some things—expressed as aphorisms and epigrams—were always true. "Still water runs deep," she would say. "A room full of friends is never crowded." And she often quoted maxims when giving time-honored advice, sayings like, "Look before you leap" or "The horse has a big head; let *him* worry." She thought these pieces of wisdom defied social change; they were true no matter who you were or what was going on in the world. But what happened around and to Iris Summers greatly affected her life and the way she lived. Her biography illustrates social change, not only for one person, but for a society through most of the last century.

Iris became a mother in the decade following the Second World War. Her children joined the twentieth-century Baby Boomers who bought rock 'n' roll vinyl records, joined the ongoing civil rights movement, and fought in Vietnam. The social tumult of their formative years made them feel like they were the century's agents of social change: protesting and demonstrating, experimenting with drugs, and questioning the American Dream of unlimited abundance and personal fulfillment through material consumption. A few years later the computer and cell phone became ubiquitous for Iris' grandchildren who were part of a more conservative Generation X. Their children, seemingly obsessed with social networking, are described by the columnist David Brooks (2013) as having "a deep suspicion of authority, the strong belief that hierarchies and organizations are suspect, [and] a fervent devotion to transparency." Her great grandchildren are Millennials, like many of you.

When Frederick Lewis Allen's *The Big Change: 1900–1950* was published in 1952, it was hard to imagine that the rate of social change in the first half of Iris Summers' life could be equaled in the second half. But social change probably accelerated.[4] The British historian Eric Hobsbawm concluded that the second half of the twentieth century were years of "extraordinary economic growth and social transformation [that] probably changed human society more profoundly than any other period of comparable brevity." In

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[4]Sociologist James Davis disagrees: "We tend to think of a conservative, rigid society suddenly modernized by a rebellious post-World War II youth . . . [However,] the strikingly modernized cohorts are those *born in the first half of the century* . . . The rate of change in the social climate [after WWII] is, if anything, less than that for its predecessor" (Davis 1996: 165, italics added).

his reckoning, the "scale and impact of the consequent economic, social and cultural transformation [was] . . . the greatest and most dramatic, rapid and universal social transformation in human history" (Hobsbawm 1994: 6, 8, 288). Iris Summers experienced both halves of the twentieth century. You— living in the twenty-first century—may experience yet an even greater acceleration of social change.

Because Iris Summers' time and place reveal the forces that compel social change today, it is worth recounting her life as she lived it: observing, anticipating, accepting, quietly resisting, and adapting in often unrecognized ways to a rapidly changing social world.

From Farm to Factory

When growing up, Iris lived near many of her relatives, and her cousins were among her closest friends and playmates. Nearly every Sunday during her childhood, relatives gathered at one or another's farm. They grew most of what they ate: fresh fruit and vegetables in season, canned, pickled, and dried goods otherwise; meat they butchered; and the flour of their wheat and corn. Ice cream was churned by hand using ice cut from the river months before and stored under hay deep in the cellar. Sunday afternoons were spent riding horses or playing in and around the barn; for the adults, in conversation and card games. Relatives would stay late—cleaning up, drinking, smoking, and listening to the radio. Some helped with evening chores like milking the cows and feeding the chickens, geese, pigs, and horses. This bucolic life was full of hardships and hard work, making the periodic abundance and leisure of Sunday gatherings all the more special.

As a girl, Iris' daily life was not terribly different from her parents' and grandparents' experience when they were young. Iris' forebearers made their own libations—cider, beer, and whiskey—instead of buying them. Rather than a radio, music was provided by local amateurs, including family members. There were more foods of a distinct ethnicity or region of the world, and the people would be speaking a different language: German, Gaelic, and Norwegian rather than English. Everyone in her family had been farmers, though. Over the centuries the machinery changed, and more work was done using the power of horses and mules. But it was a similarly difficult and precarious life, with more than a little social and political injustice.

Iris' grandparents on her father's side were from Germany before it was Germany. That is, they lived in an autocratic state rife with religious intolerance. Letters from the old country told of impending war driven by Prussia's goal of German unification, of young men being pressed into

fighting. The bell and iron fence of a Catholic church were melted down and forged into a cannon, and many of the peasants—especially the Catholics—quietly packed up their farms and fled the region, becoming immigrants in a new land.

Her mother's family lived in Canada for several generations before migrating to the United States. They were horse and mule breeders, masons, and house builders, wheelwrights who built wagons and carts, traders and millers. All of them had a farm to produce most of what they needed. Iris and her husband had distant relatives with names like Chandler (lantern or candle maker), Sawyer, Smith (blacksmith), Cuthbert (thief),[5] Skinner, and Miller.

NAMES AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Names tell a story of social as well as personal change. The practice of adopting a family name often indicates that an increasingly strong state wants to keep track of its citizens, usually to tax them or conscript them into war. Polish, Persian, Hindu, or Chinese immigrants, among others, have their name altered when they migrate so they will sound and be spelled in a way recognizable by people who speak only the host country's language. People from disfavored groups sometimes change their names to avoid discrimination in their new land of opportunity.

The names of the world's boxing champions tell the story of social change, in particular the story of immigration and upward social mobility. The point at which a prominent ethnic group's names diminish from the list of great prizefighters is a rough approximation of when the ethnic group "made it" in America. First were the Irish, German, and Scottish fighters (John L. Sullivan, Jack Dempsey, Harry Greb, Bob Fitzsimmons), followed by Jews (Barney Ross, Benny Leonard/Benjamin Liener) and Italians (Rocky Graziano, Carmen Basilio, Rocky Marciano, Jake LaMotta, Ray Mancini), a century of African American boxers (Jack Johnson, Henry Armstrong, Joe Lewis, Sugar Ray Robinson, Archie Moore, Sugar Ray Leonard, Floyd Mayweather, Jr.) and more recently

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[5]This name is possibly derived from *cutpurse*, a pickpocket in Shakespeare's day. On the English shore a cutpurse is a sharp-edged clam, suitable for cutting the strings of a purse.

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Latino boxers (John Ruiz, Paulie Ayala, Steve Curry, Tony Lopez). Both of the latter groups have yet to achieve equity in American society and continue to have many fighters in the ring.

In the United States, supporters of women's equality who married in the 1960s and 1970s were much more likely to keep their family name or hyphenate their own and their husbands' family names than were women marrying in earlier and more recent decades. Following the civil rights movement, ethnic pride among African Americans contributed to an upsurge in creative, distinctive first names.[6] Religious conversion (e.g., from Christianity to Islam or the Nation of Islam) sends a strong political message of change. No one could miss the point being made by the great prizefighter Cassius Clay when he became Muhammad Ali,[7] when the fiery orator and Black Power activist Malcolm Little became Malcolm X, or when the poet, dramatist, critic, and activist LeRoi Jones became Amiri Baraka.

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[6] Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner (2006: 167–168) found that "More than 40 percent of the black girls born in California in a given year receive a name that not one of the roughly 100,000 baby white girls received that year . . . Nearly 30 percent of the black girls are given a name that is unique among the names of every baby, white and black, born that year in California."

[7] Athletes, like celebrities, change their names for many reasons, as explained by Mike Tanier (2012).

Like many of your grandparents and great-grandparents, Iris Summers was born on a farm. Literally, she was born in her parents' bed in a house on a farm, delivered by a woman who lived nearby and had a lot of experience helping women in labor. Birth on the farm—calves, colts, piglets, chicks, pups, and kittens—was an everyday event, and so was slaughtering pigs, cattle and chickens for the family's meals. Three generations of Iris' ancestors were captured on daguerreotype and tintype, and the first pictures of Iris were portraits taken in a studio. But her grandchildren have many pictures of her and her family on their farm, sometimes in work clothes and often with farm animals. That's because, when she was a girl, the family bought a Kodak Brownie camera that

allowed her generation to be the first in human history to have a visual record of their lives preserved for posterity.[8]

Just about everyone Iris knew lived on a farm. The children were hauled or trekked to school miles away, and most left school after only a few years.[9] When she was born, small-scale agriculture was the work of millions of people. Across the nation, twice the amount of energy was used by agriculture as was used in manufacturing. During her childhood, half of all Americans could say they lived or had lived on farms, but that was rapidly changing. Farm foreclosures were common in the 1920s, even before the Great Depression of the 1930s. Small family farms were consolidated into larger farms that spurred rural-to-urban migration and set the stage for the onset of industrial agriculture: large farms, expensive equipment, massive amounts of petrochemical fertilizers, and a food system dominated by large corporations. By the end of the twentieth century agriculture employed less than one in fifty American workers. Iris' children and grandchildren tilled the soil only to plant flowers, but one of her great grandchildren now grows vegetables in an abandoned lot in a decaying city.

Iris grew up poor. But then most people were poor by any of today's measures of material consumption.[10] Only when she was in her teens did her family buy a car, a black Model T, just the same as many of their neighbors. Later they purchased a battery-powered radio. Their home had running water in the kitchen, from a shallow well dug by her father and uncles, but there was no hot water for bathing or washing dishes other than what could be heated in a large kettle on the stove. As long as the house stood, it never had a bathroom; an outhouse twenty yards off the back porch served the purpose. Soon after she left the farm, electricity lines were strung across the

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[8]In 1888, George Eastman coined the name *Kodak* and marketed a camera that took one hundred pictures. When finished, owners sent $10 and the entire camera to the Eastman Kodak Company. They received back the prints and a newly loaded camera. This was popular but affordable only by the more affluent. In 1900, Eastman marketed the Brownie for $1 plus fifteen cents for a six-exposure role of film that could be removed and mailed in for developing. In the first year of sales, a quarter million Brownie cameras were sold. Photography had come to the masses.

[9]In 1900, 6 percent of seventeen-year-olds graduated from high school. In 1915 13.5 percent graduated, and in 1926 a quarter did. That figure doubled by 1967 and is now about 85 percent.

[10]"The average American was twice as well off [materially] in 2007 as in 1972, four times as well off as in 1937, and eight times as well off as in 1902" (Gordon 2013).

countryside and hooked up to the house. This was part of rural electrification—a program of the federal government to get the nation's economy out of the Great Depression and a major reason farming and rural life changed so much in the twentieth century.

In the 1940s, telephone lines were installed, though several families shared a "party line" with her household. Every family had its specific ring, and people were expected to not listen in on another family's conversations. Many years after Iris left home, a gas range replaced the wood-burning kitchen stove. The farmhouse was old, small, and poorly built, however. When small farms were being bought up to make way for larger farms in the 1950s, it was torn down along with many of the neighbors' houses, barns, and equipment sheds. Orchards were leveled and lanes were plowed into fields. Only a few massive oak trees told her grandchildren where she and her brothers and sisters had once lived.

Iris left home when she was a young woman, and she spent her adult life in small towns. In her backyard she planted a big garden, and she preserved food, mostly by canning. Though a small woman, she could wield a spade and efficiently butcher a chicken. She knitted, made quilts, and sewed clothes, and she always thought the family's dog was kept not for companionship but to provide protection. Many of the skills and attitudes of her parents, required to maintain their farm household, were increasingly of little use to her and were treated as quaint practices—old-fashioned—by her kids and grandkids.

When Iris' parents were too old to farm and the children had left home they, too, moved to town. Five years after the 1935 Social Security Act was passed, her parents began receiving a modest monthly income that continued for the rest of their lives. As poor farmers, there had been little opportunity to save for retirement, and they would otherwise have depended on their grown children for a place to live and financial help, just the same as had their parents and grandparents. Eighty years later increasing numbers of grandparents are again living with their children, and many adult children are now living with their parents; but in between it was expected—and possible—for every generation to live more or less on their own.

Iris married Frank Summers soon after completing high school. In her day, less than one in ten young women was sexually experienced before marriage.[11] Even though it was the decade of the Great Depression, Frank had found a job soon after finishing high school and became a skilled laborer. He was making a good wage, the criterion for his generation to

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[11]Among unmarried women in the U.S. today, more than 70 percent have experienced coitus before their twentieth birthday (Frank 2013).

marry and start a family. All his life, Frank could never understand why young people would marry before they were economically secure or why young adults with jobs would remain single. The compact in an affluent society between work, marriage, and family would begin to break down for Frank and Iris' grandchildren in the last decades of the twentieth century.

When World War II began, Frank's work—in a sector of the economy deemed important to the war effort—kept him out of uniform. But he and Iris didn't sit out the war. Along with millions of others, they planted a victory garden for some of their food and purchased war bonds to help underwrite the country's military expenses. Like all Americans, they were subject to rationing and restrictions on what they could purchase: foodstuffs like sugar and cocoa, automotive products including oil and rubber tires, and household items. Much of the country's manufacturing was converted to the production of military equipment and supplies, not unlike—though on a lesser scale than—in Britain, Germany, Japan, and other nations prior to and during the war. The scope of military preparedness and the ways wars would be fought changed dramatically in Iris' lifetime, something she never approved of despite her strong patriotism.

Frank Summers, too, was born on a farm and grew up learning the skills and acquiring the habits of mind of rural families. His paternal grandfather was born during the time of slavery and had fought in the Civil War. Frank's grandpa would have been astonished by the changes in agriculture, a transformation that began about the time Iris and Frank were growing up. Animal traction—plowing, hauling, and harvesting with animals—gave way in those years to tractors and trucks with internal combustion engines. In time, the implements pulled by the tractor would be fitted with their own sources of power and grow to be huge and expensive, capable of working far more land in a single day than Iris and Frank's childhood farms combined. Farms would cease producing food to be eaten by the family, and most food would be produced by corporate-owned operations that more closely resembled factories.

This dramatic change in the rural landscape was repeated throughout much of the industrialized world in the twentieth century. It was thought that, in time, all countries would produce food by a similar industrial process, becoming the model for rural development in poorer countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia that gained their independence after mid-century. Along with mechanization came other technologies, including hybridization of plants and the development and widespread use of synthetic chemicals to stimulate plant growth, kill weeds, and eliminate insect pests.

By the end of the twentieth century, the genetic material in seeds was being modified, a technological byproduct of one of the most important

scientific discoveries of the century, the unmasking of the genetic code underlying the evolution of all life forms. Greater food production made possible a growing global population, but global inequality grew as well. At the turn of the twenty-first century a third of the world's people were living on less than $2 a day, including 36 percent of the people of China and 76 percent of the people in India.

The Spread of Science and Technology

In terms of material goods, Iris shared in the century's growing prosperity. So much changed: corporations had billions of dollars in assets, and half of the jobs people did hadn't existed when she was born; cities ringed with suburbs as far as the eye could see; travel and communication became much easier; the scope and preparations for international conflict mushroomed; the vast globalization of manufacturing and trade increased many-fold; and Western popular culture and political systems modeled after those of the United States and European nations were embraced across the globe. The changing map of the world marked the transformation of empires into independent national states (to 71 nations were added 125 more), especially in Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. New international organizations like the agencies of the United Nations and the World Bank played an increasingly important part in international relations and global capitalism.

The pursuit of science vastly increased the range of interventions in health, from inoculations to organ transplants and gene therapy. Plate tectonics transformed geology; evolutionary psychology seemed to diminish the idea that human beings are exceptional in the animal kingdom. The general theory of relativity and quantum mechanics changed how people thought about not only space and time but also "the way we think about almost everything, not only in physics but in chemistry and biology and philosophy . . . about cause and effect, about past and future, about facts and probabilities" (Dyson 2010: 20). In short, everything from the vast universe to nanoparticles and the unseen subatomic world. People walked on the moon, black holes became a fact, and Hubble's photographs opened up the universe to radically new understandings of what Iris called "out there" as well as an appreciation for Mother Earth as a beautiful and fragile environment.

The amount of knowledge and technology grew exponentially over the course of Iris Summers' lifetime. This, and the ideas of human and social improvement impelling much of the work of engineers, scientists, and practitioners, increased the human capacity to affect what earlier generations

had accepted as the natural order of things, fate, or beyond the reach of human intervention—from weather to mental health, from old age to social inequality. William Gamson sums this up: "The major thrust of social change . . . has been to subject more and more forces to the manipulation of conscious decisions" (Gamson 1968: 189).

Medical science, civil engineering, theoretical physics, information technology, and sciences whose names and province completely escaped Iris Summers contributed to making the products that became part of everyday life in affluent societies. The landscape of the world's poor countries, too, was changed by the desire of their own people to have a better life.

Iris Summers thought the best thing to happen in her lifetime was television. It opened a world to her and her family they otherwise would have never known. Entertainers like Steve Allen and Jack Benny, performing artists like Van Cliburn and Mahalia Jackson, Arthur Miller's dramas, *National Geographic* specials, historical documentaries, and the evening news greatly enriched her adult life. She and her family learned things, developed an appreciation for the arts, and became more socially aware because they watched television.

Less well understood or recognized by Iris was that she became a member of that great consuming army who discovered, first through radio and television and then the Internet, things they never knew they needed. Though she retained the frugality of her background—and especially her experience with the prolonged worldwide economic depression of the 1930s—she spent much of her life considering, figuring out if she could afford, working in order to have, and purchasing *things*. She was a practical person and not terribly swayed by advertising, or so she thought.

Decades of Social Movements

Iris Summers never marched in the streets or waved a sign. She was an observer, like most people, and watched from the sidelines as younger, more confident, and more passionate advocates sought public attention and action for their causes. News came to her in slim local newspapers and short radio and television broadcasts each evening, and later from cable news and the Internet. Given her experiences as a young woman, she had a positive opinion about social change, but it took some time to get comfortable with the idea of social change to advance social justice.

It wasn't that her generation avoided public controversy. During her young adult years American labor was extremely successful as a social movement, leading to the creation of the powerful United Auto Workers, the unionization of the country's coal miners, steelworkers, and longshoremen, and the

establishment of the Congress of Industrial Organization. Well before the 1950s and 1960s—the seminal years of its court and legislative victories—the civil rights movement was active in opposing racial segregation and other forms of discrimination against African Americans. Iris was curious about the anti-nuclear weapons movement that emerged in the 1950s, and the second wave of the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s made a lot of sense of her.[12] Iris, however, never took an active part of any of this.

As she got older, the strong opinions of her children, nieces, and nephews helped convince her that the U.S. war in Southeast Asia was a mistake, that discriminatory treatment experienced by gays and lesbians was unfair, that women should have equal rights and opportunities, that pollution was ruining the environment, and that governments should play a more active role in helping the disadvantaged. Her memory of poverty, farm fore-closures, and unemployment gave her a sense that personal problems weren't just for lack of trying. There was racism, sexism and discrimination, political opportunism and demagoguery, corporate corruption and corrupt politicians, and a lot of other things that needed fixing.

Public safety campaigns and social movements to change behavior had mixed results with Iris Summers. Antismoking campaigns never fazed her, but she quickly supported the Keep America Beautiful antilitter campaign to stop the way people casually threw trash out their car windows.[13] She was very uncomfortable using seat belts. Though aware of the statistics on seat belt safety and auto collision injuries, Iris believed she would be burned alive if, in a collision, she couldn't unfasten the seat belt in time to escape. She and her husband, Frank, never built a bomb shelter, despite their popularity in the 1950s and the urgings of their neighbors. Nor did she visibly protest corporate malfeasance by boycotting a company or product. She approved

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[12] "Waves of feminism" describes the evolution of the women's movement that has realized considerable success in changing laws and social policies (especially suffrage for first-wave feminism) and the passage of equal opportunity legislation such as Title IX of the Civil Rights Act, as amended in 1972 (for second-wave feminism). Because of Title IX, more than three million girls participate in high school sports today, ten times more than in 1972. Succeeding generations (third-wave feminism) take much of this for granted and see the pursuit of women's equality in a different light, focusing on other issues (Gillis et al. 2004).

[13] Heather Rogers' *Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage* describes how this campaign was actually a very successful corporate-sponsored effort to define the problem of everyday pollution as a failure of people to properly dispose of trash, deflecting the public's focus away from the creation of trash (often nonbiodegradable) by bottling and packaging companies.

of what many social movements of her life accomplished, but she was largely a bystander.

When her children and younger relatives talked with her about their social and political concerns, she would describe how families used to take care of one another when someone needed help. She could recount how female teachers lived together and, though some people may have suspected a lesbian relationship, this was a private matter and not something needing public discussion. She would tell them, perhaps naively, that in her day the races didn't want to mix, but since young people felt differently, she supposed it was all right.

A Woman in a Changing Society

The expectations for most young women of Iris Summers' generation were fairly simple: keep a good reputation, marry, become a mother, be a faithful and supportive wife, and do whatever it takes to give your children a good chance in life. That meant knowing how to cook, clean, and care for everyday illnesses; having a nice yard; and being a good neighbor. Though not affluent, Iris knew she was lucky. Her husband was a steady provider, was never seriously hurt on the job, and remained her husband until he died. Not so for her siblings or her children. When her sister Ruth's husband was killed in a hunting accident, life's difficulties for a single mother seemed unavoidable and often insurmountable. Ruth's family of four quickly plunged into poverty that was relieved only when Ruth again married and became the mother of her new husband's children. Their "blended family" seemed unusual, especially when compared with what was portrayed in the early days of television, but in fact was not atypical of families throughout history.

Many women were enlisted into the paid workforce during both World Wars I and II. Single women and women who headed families, and especially non-White females, had always worked outside the home in numbers greater than married women, but the numbers increased for White wives as well. As a young woman, Iris Summers knew she would be leaving the farm, so she studied to be a nurse. Like many aspiring but poor young girls, she could receive her education in exchange for working in the hospital where she was being trained and lived. But work was scarce when she finished her degree, and she soon married and began traveling with her husband as he went from jobsite to jobsite. Only when the last of her children were well into school did she return to work, and then only part-time.[14]

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[14]That Iris' career as mother and employee was within the norm for her generation is shown in Figure 2.2 in the next chapter.

Times were very different for her daughters and granddaughters. In 1950, less than a third of all adult women between ages eighteen and sixty-five were in the paid workforce. By 1980, it was clear that most families could not maintain a middle-class lifestyle on only one income. Iris' daughters and their daughters worked outside the home, full-time and for most of their entire adult lives. Women's employment increased to 60 percent in 2000.[15]

The women's movement rightfully takes credit for women increasingly seeking careers beyond those of wife and mother, and if Iris had suggested to her granddaughters that they should quit their jobs to raise a family, they would have found this a curious idea—attractive but impossible. When President Bill Clinton talked about "people who work hard and play by the rules," Iris felt he was talking about her family. This, however, didn't mean that everything went smoothly.

Five of Iris' six children married, and three divorced. That was about average for their generation.[16] Her children moved many times for their jobs or in search of work, to do military service, go to college, or just out of wanderlust. They ultimately settled too far away to make it easy to visit Iris and Frank on weekends, so holidays, vacations, and close relatives' weddings and funerals became the times she occasionally saw her children and grandchildren. When Iris died, most relatives of her generation traveled less than a hundred miles to attend the funeral. Her children took flights from around the country in order to be there.

The Personal Challenge of Social Change

The Great Depression and Second World War were watersheds in Iris Summers' life. They were the major events that forged her worldview, while the changes they wrought in global power and economic might—much of it shifting to the United States—vastly changed the world in which she lived. Perhaps because several of her children came of age in the 1960s, Iris also was much affected by the events of that decade and changed many of the ways she looked at the world.

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[15]In 1999, 74 percent of women ages twenty-five to fifty-four in the U.S. worked outside the home. That number declined to 69 percent in 2013, largely as a consequence of the Great Recession of 2008–2011, the persistence of low wages, and the cost of being employed (e.g., daycare, commuting, etc.) (Miller and Alderman 2014).

[16]This remains true for couples who marry at an early age and for lower-income couples. For college-educated and more affluent couples, however, the divorce rate is much lower today than in previous decades. Possibly two-thirds of marriages occurring today will not end in divorce (Stevenson and Wolfers 2011; Miller 2014a).

The U.S. invasion of Vietnam was the first televised war. The iconic newsman Walter Cronkite provided the "body count" on a nightly basis, reminding viewers that—in addition to the many Vietnamese—hundreds of young American men and women were dying every week. The interplay of military violence and nearly instant communication was a dramatic new reality, changing how wars were to be carried out and publicly understood in the decades ahead.

Iris was at a loss when the modern civil rights movement took off in the mid-1950s. She had grown up in a White world, never having a neighbor or friend who was Black or Hispanic or spoke a different language. She never liked hearing racial slurs and jokes, but she didn't comprehend the deep injustices African Americans experienced on a daily basis. She had difficulty understanding the steadfastness with which civil rights activists pursued the cause of racial justice. Watching the marches on TV and hearing the speeches of leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King and Shirley Chisholm, she would ask her children, "Why do they keep saying, 'I want to be free'? This is a free country, isn't it?"[17]

Probably like millions of nonminority people, a change in Iris' thinking about race and civil rights followed a crooked path, and small things sometimes had a large impact on her. The 1956 movie *Imitation of Life*, with its parallel mother-and-daughter stories—one White, one Black—touched her deeply. She loved Scott Joplin's music and Sammy Davis Jr.'s singing and dancing. She thought Jackie Robinson was a truly brave individual. And when she watched Bull Connor and the police, along with chanting and cursing crowds of Whites, attack civil rights marchers, she believed she knew whose side she was on. Four little girls blown up in a Birmingham, Alabama, church and the murders of civil rights workers like Viola Luizzo and Medgar Evers broke her heart. She began that long road so many of her generation had to travel, rethinking not only the rights of African Americans but the everyday relationships among people in an increasingly diverse society.

When Iris was older, she and Frank lived on social security, a small savings, and a pension from Frank's last job. They had always been frugal, and it suited their lifelong habits to buy little more than what they needed.

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[17]Fifty years after passage of major civil rights legislation, some perceptions still dramatically differ by race. Academic research and public opinion polls taken during the O. J. Simpson trial (1994), after the Rodney King and Abner Louima beatings (1992 and 1997), the police shooting of Amadou Diallo (1999), the killing of Trayvon Martin (2012), and the deaths of Eric Gardner, Michael Brown, and Tamir Rice (2014) reveal a wide gulf between White opinion and Black opinion about policing practices and the racial fairness of the criminal justice system (Balz and Clement 2014; see Peffley and Hurwitz 2010).

Looking back at the childhood she left behind, Iris recognized what Clair Brown (1994) describes as "the bleakness of everyday material life" of most working-class and farm families. Like tens of millions of others, they benefited greatly from decades of robust economic growth.

When she and Frank applied for a credit card, they were initially turned down because they had no credit rating, having always paid cash for their purchases. They always knew the exact balance of their checking account and never used an ATM. When Iris finally got a credit card she hardly ever used it. Though her grandchildren gave her a computer and showed her how to use email, Iris preferred to talk on the telephone (on a land line, not a cell phone) and write letters. She never used a digital camera, never held a smartphone or downloaded an app, never texted or tweeted, and though she occasionally looked for information (mostly the weather) on the Internet, she didn't have a Facebook page.

In the last quarter of the century, as the environmental movement grew with public awareness of the ways human beings were threatening the environment, Iris' habit of reusing things most people dispose of, and her distaste for wasting water while brushing her teeth and leaving lights on when nobody was in the room, caused her to seem prophetic and a forerunner to green living. Frank was the same way. He kept his old car running to its final demise, bought his clothes at a secondhand store, walked rather than drove whenever he could, composted kitchen scraps, planted grass that required very little watering, and cut it with a push mower.

If everyone lived that way, the economies of the United States and the world would look very different than they do, and many people's idea of happiness would never be realized. But we also know that a lifestyle fueled by nonrenewable resources and financed with borrowed money can also be very problematic and, in time, catastrophic.

Perhaps Iris missed out on the fads and fashions as well as the revolution in digital technology, but the changes she did experience in the economic, political, and social fabric during the twentieth century were immense and unavoidable. Her resistance to social change was largely on a personal level. Her experience of structural changes was inevitable, and as a consequence, her choices and options were altered with the social changes of her lifetime.

During her lifetime the U.S. economy grew "by a factor of sixteen, and GDP per capita by a factor of six" (Kolbert 2014: 70). Productivity gains were passed on to workers in the form of higher salaries and wages, pensions, and health insurance. By the time their children became adults, however, the U.S. economy was competing with rising economies globally. Over the last quarter of the twentieth century, wage earners on average saw no increase in earnings, and median family income declined with the Great Recession of 2007–2010. Wealth and income inequality increased to levels not seen in nearly a century.

As the years passed, global competition, deteriorating industrial plants, corporate layoffs amid the substitution of technology for people, and the declining power of workers to negotiate with large corporations worsened the prospect of good jobs for millions of people.[18] Productivity gains meant higher incomes at the top, while workers' incomes stagnated. Social mobility in the United States—the chance of getting ahead—fell behind many European countries.[19] Changes in the federal tax code increasingly favored the wealthy by reducing taxes on unearned income (e.g., proceeds from stocks and bonds) that goes mostly to the affluent. Globally, manufacturing increased 57 times from 1900 to 2010, but an increasing portion of that was taking place in China and elsewhere. Even as women became the majority of medical school students and were entering legal and scientific professions in ever larger numbers, the quality of most people's working lives—women included—declined (Sennett 1998). The promise of doing better than one's parents continues to pose a challenge to Iris' grandchildren.

INEQUALITY IN THE UNITED STATES

Between 1979 and 2012 the share of national income captured by the richest 1 percent of taxpayers increased from 10 percent to 22.5 percent. Had their share instead remained at 10 percent and the rest been distributed equitably among taxpayers in the bottom 99 percent, each would have $7,105 more to spend.

—Eduardo Porter (2013)[20]

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[18]In 2013, the portion of the total U.S. workforce that belonged to unions (11.3 percent) was the lowest in seventy-five years. Private-sector workers in unions fell to 7.1 million, or 6.7 percent. Today, more than half of all union members are public employees, 7.6 million or 35.3 percent (e.g., teachers, police officers, firefighters), and they are five times more likely to be union members (BLS 2014).

[19]Claude Fischer and Michael Hout's *Century of Difference* (2006) concludes that education plays the most crucial role in influencing people's life chances today. This contrasts with the huge influence of nationality and immigrant status in 1900. Their findings parallel the life of Iris Summers. The children of farmers, many of whom had parents who were born abroad, became factory and craft workers, and their children became service employees. Over the century, job opportunities became less a matter of where a person's family came from (their nationality) and more a matter of a person's educational attainment.

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As is often remarked, the United States is among the richest countries in the world. Its economic output is more than two times that of the world's second largest economy, China's. U.S. per capita income is among the highest, and its capability to solve problems—with tremendous human capital, an innovative private sector, and institutions of scientific research—is unmatched. It also is first among industrialized countries in income inequality. The gap between rich and poor has been growing steadily for the past fifty years, while a small sliver of the ultra-rich has captured, to use Porter's term, an astonishing portion of income and wealth.

The widening gap is part of the picture of social change in the United States. Globalization has created more competition for jobs that, along with declining strength of labor unions, has reduced the earning power of workers, especially in manufacturing. Technology has created winners and losers by eliminating many good-paying jobs while rewarding tech-savvy, better educated job seekers. A corporate world of mergers and sell-offs has made a lifetime career with one corporation—plus health benefits and a pension—less likely.

The rise of the financial sector gives a few individuals a path to amass tremendous wealth. Lately a couple dozen hedge fund managers each took home, on average, more than a billion dollars a year. Executive pay has skyrocketed.[21] The Economic Policy Institute found chief executives' pay in 2011 was 725 percent higher than in 1978 while the average worker's compensation increased 5.7 percent.[22] In 2010, as the Great

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[20] Porter was citing the research of university economists Lawrence Katz, Claudia Goldin, and Davit Autor.

[21] Equilar, a firm that follows executive compensation, reported that in 2012 chief executives of the top corporations in the nation jumped 16 percent, to $15.1 million (Greenhouse 2013), approximately 270 times greater than the income of the average full-time worker. Putting this in perspective, in 2013 twenty-five hedge fund managers "made more than twice as much as all the kindergarten teachers in America combined" (Krugman 2014a), Or, the cost of universal pre-kindergarten for all the children in the United States could be paid for with one month's earnings of six hedge fund managers" (Kristof 2014: 25).

[22] The lowest 20 percent fared even worse. Between 1979 and 2007, their hourly pay rose only 3.2 percent, adjusted for inflation (Shierholz 2014). See the many publications on growing inequality by the Economic Policy Institute at www.epi.org. Offering a slightly different view, economist Richard Burkhauser and his fellow researchers at Cornell University calculate the average worker's increase between 1979 and 2007 (before the Great Recession) at 18.2 percent by taking into account the earned-income tax credit and other government tax changes and benefits.

Recession began to subside, 93 percent of the gain in national income went to just 1 percent of earners. Two years later, the top-earning 10 percent took home nearly half (46.5 percent) of all U.S. income; of this, the top 1 percent took more than a fifth (22.5 percent), the highest portion since 1913 (Saez 2013; see also Piketty 2014). The top .01 percent captured an average of $38.9 million each in 2009 and $31 million in 2012 (Lowrey 2014). As a consequence of income inequality, wealth inequality, too, has become much more concentrated. In 1989, 3 percent of families held almost 45 percent of the wealth; by 2013 they held nearly 55 percent (Cassidy 2014). The six living heirs to Sam Walton, founder of Walmart, have as much wealth between them as the bottom 100 million Americans (Kristof 2014).

Median household income was 9 percent lower in 2011 than it was in 1999, and half of all jobs today pay less than $34,000 a year. The decline in earnings has hit hardest men with less education. Since 1979 earnings of men without a high school education have fallen 24 percent. Adjusting for inflation, men with only a high school degree earned 20 percent less in 2010 than in 1979. The main reason for declining household income is low hourly wages. About 21 million workers earn between the minimum wage ($7.25) and $10 an hour; of those only 14 percent are under twenty years of age, and 77 percent have at least a high school diploma (Greenhouse 2013).[23]

But young workers of all stripes are suffering the most in the slow recovery following the Great Recession.[24] They have the highest rate of unemployment, are least likely to have health insurance, and saw their net worth drop by 68 percent between 1984 and 2009 (see also Federal Reserve 2014). Even among young college graduates, 44 percent have jobs that don't require a college degree and often work for very low wages with little chance of advancement (Perlin 2011).

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[23] Another way to think about inequality is inequality of consumption. Who has the money to buy things? "In 2012, the top 5 percent of earners were responsible for 38 percent of domestic consumption, up from 28 percent in 1985," according to researchers at Washington University and the Federal Reserve Bank. They found that since 2009, "spending by this top echelon has risen 17 percent, compared with just 1 percent among the bottom 95 percent" (Schwartz 2014: A11).

[24] Six years after it began, median household income was $4,600 lower and wages for 80 percent of workers were lower than in 2007, one fifth of homeowners with mortgages still owed more than their house was worth, and the nation's economy was operating with seven million jobs below its potential (Dewan et al. 2014).

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Figure 1.1   Top Pre-Tax Income Share in the U.S., 1970–2012

Source: Piketty and Saez (2003).

Not Every Person's Story: Capturing Social Change in Personal Experience

Iris Summers' is only one person's story. She is not an "average American" in the sense of fitting the profile of a statistical mean of personal characteristics. For example, by a wide margin Americans have lived in cities and suburbs during the last half century, but Iris lived in small towns. Hers is a story of the rural Midwest, not the Atlantic Coast, the South, or the West Coast. It is not an immigrant's story, the story of an African American or physically challenged person, a lesbian's story or that of an upwardly mobile White man. She didn't fight in a war, was never arrested, nor did she suffer a debilitating illness. She didn't have a passport and never traveled to a foreign country, didn't know a language other than English, and she wasn't particularly interested in what she called "foreign food."

Iris may have experienced discrimination because of her social class, gender, and rural background, but hers could not compare to the experiences of those whose life chances were severely restricted and, sometimes, whose personal safety was threatened or violated because of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or nationality. In this way she was like a great many of her fellow citizens.

Despite this, in Iris Summers' life can be seen the influences of the historical periods through which she lived. Obvious as well are the consequences of passing through the life course. As Chapter 2 explains, social change is experienced differently depending upon whether you are young, in your middle years, or elderly. Her peers—the millions of people born early in the century—made up a generation with unique features that experienced and placed demands on the world around them. They, more than any other generation, shifted from rural lives to industrial and postindustrial work. They used the power of the state[25] to help them live decent lives, through a public commitment to education and scientific research, regulating public health and safety, building a modern infrastructure, creating social security, Medicare and Medicaid, federally insuring bank deposits, and funding military industries that fueled regional and local economies.

After getting started as adults in the midst of the worst economic crisis of the century, her generation was asked to support and fight the century's most destructive war. The sustained economic expansion from 1947 to 1970 benefited them at the height of their careers and filled their lives with an abundance of material goods and opportunities. Theirs was the first generation to live with a substantial social safety net and, as they grew old, their health care was largely paid for through a public health insurance program. They saw hometown banking shift to powerful Wall Street financial institutions and the stock market go from trading millions of shares daily to billions of shares on a regular basis.

The American labor movement rose and declined in Iris Summers' lifetime, while the women's movement, the civil rights movement, the guns rights and antiabortion movements, the environmental movement, the public interest movement, the gay rights movement, and other efforts of

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[25] "The state" as a driver of social change is the topic of Chapter 8, but to avoid misunderstanding at the outset it should be pointed out that the term, as used by social scientists, is a shorthand reference to the system of power administered by governments. These include local, state, and federal governments that "speak in the name of the state and [are] formally *invested* with state power" (Miliband 1969: 50). Michael Mann, following the ideas of Max Weber, recognizes two dimensions of the state: the institutional and the functional, that is, what states are and what states do. "The state contains four main elements, being: (1) a *differentiated* set of institutions and personnel embodying (2) *centrality* in the sense that political relations radiate outwards from a center to cover (3) a *territorially demarcated area*, over which it exercises (4) a monopoly of *authoritative binding rule-making* backed up by a monopoly of the means of physical violence" (Mann 1988: 4, italics in the original).

millions of people and thousands of organizations sought to move the society in new, uncharted directions. Her generation, and subsequent generations, developed a more socially tolerant attitude, and they increasingly lived in a more ethnically diverse and culturally contested environment.

The forces of social change experienced by Iris Summers and those around her are the same ones that impel social change today, not only in the United States but across the globe: social movements, corporate activity, state initiatives, war, and science-based technologies, subjects covered in Chapters 4 through 8.

Personal Change and Social Change

For most people, what they take to be *social* change feels very personal and local. A child's family moves, and suddenly they are in a new house, a new school, with new friends. A young person joins the military, hoping to get the structure, respect, and skills to pursue a steady, productive life. People move in together, marry, divorce, and establish new relationships. They age and face new challenges. Individuals decide they'll live differently. They change their clothes, start exercising, adopt a new hairstyle, ditch their car, slow down their partying, are absorbed by a new skill or interest, and buy things to express who they are. Being old enough to go to school, date, leave school, drink alcohol, join the military, drive, vote, and qualify for Medicare and Social Security initiate significant personal changes in an individual's social circumstances. Personal experiences, however, are a part of something bigger than themselves, something very social.

Social change can be thought of as the sum total of many people's personal changes in social contexts undergoing change. Youth come of age during a war that needs hundreds of thousands of young men and women to fight. In the face of a daunting economic recession, millions of people face unemployment and can't find a good job that allows them to fully use their education and experience. People live through the years of civil rights legislation, finally stripping away barriers to their pursuit of opportunity. You may be growing into an adulthood of rapidly expanding digital technology providing instant information, entertainment, and communication. You can walk around with a powerful computer in your hand (or on your face?) that answers any question, takes and shares videos and photos, tells you where you are, and links you to friends 24/7. And it is happening to millions of others. That's one way to think about social change.

Definitions of social change invariably enumerate the things that are social and the things that change. For example, Wilbert Moore (1972) defines social change as a "significant alteration in social structure." Moore's definition is extended by Harper and Leicht, as "the significant alteration in social structure and cultural patterns through time":

> *Social structure* [is] a persistent network of social relationships where interaction between persons or groups has become routine and repetitive . . . Culture is the shared way of living and thinking that includes symbols and language, . . . knowledge, beliefs, and values, . . . norms, . . . and techniques ranging from common folk recipes to sophisticated technologies and material objects. (Harper and Leicht 2007: 5)

Relationships, group norms, beliefs, technologies, and material objects extend beyond the individual. The idea that social change is an individual experience differing from what others—at an earlier time—have experienced is incomplete if it does not examine the social processes, powerful forces, and networks of relationships surrounding the experiences.

Robert Nisbet (1969: 169) more abstractly defines social change as "a succession of differences in time within a persistent identity." What Nisbet means can be seen by comparing Iris Summers' marriage and those of her children. To be married is a "persistent identity," something Iris and Frank had in common with their children. One "succession of differences" is the greater preponderance of the children's marriages ending in divorce. What changed? Marital life or, if you like, fidelity to a marriage?

Two or three generations earlier, when women died in high numbers during their childbearing years, men remarried and fathered more children. Improvements in maternal health and life expectancy for women (and men) changed this. Married couples could look forward to many more years together and many more years of possible discord resulting in divorce. In Iris' lifetime, women's growing opportunity for economic independence lessened their need to remain in a loveless, oppressive, or perhaps violent relationship. As gender roles changed, so did people's expectations for marriage. This partly explains the high rate of divorce in the 1960s and 1970s, a rate (divorces per 1,000 marriages) that—noted earlier—has been declining since, as shown in Figure 1.2.

What causes personal changes that are made manifest in the lives of large numbers of people? That is what we want to uncover and in so doing better understand the ways of social change.

Figure 1.2   Marriage and Divorce Rates in the U.S., 1946–2008
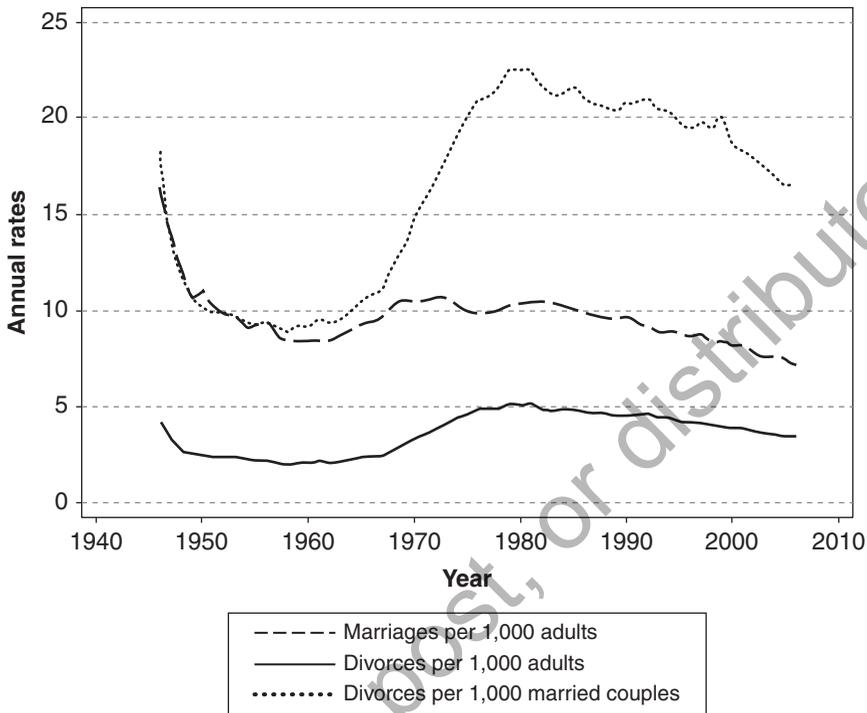
Source: Stevenson, Betsey and Justin Wolfers. 2011. "Trends in Marital Stability." Pp. 96–108 in Lloyd R. Cohen and Joshua D. Wright (eds.) *Research Handbook on the Economics of Family Law*. Edward Elgar.

The Rise of Civilization and the Two Master Trends of Modern Times

Gradual Social Change in Pre-Modern Times

Most of what we know about societies, culture, and human accomplishment is from the record of human history following the last Ice Age ten thousand years ago. Our knowledge of earlier human social life is very fragmentary. The archeological and anthropological record shows that for many hundreds of thousands of years life for various hominoids changed very, very slowly, but human accomplishments were far from insignificant. *Homo erectus* and other hominoids (e.g., Neanderthals, Denisovans) migrated to populate the

habitable distant portions of the planet. They developed pivotal technologies such as stone tools and weapons; crafted wood, pottery and natural dyes; used symbolic communication; and probably established group norms and a sense of identity that increased their capacity, both physically and socially, to survive and reproduce.

The overall picture of preliterate *Homo sapiens* is one of resilience, adaptive strategies largely governed by environmental conditions, very slow population growth, and the development of diverse languages and practices over a 200,000 year period. The Paleolithic drawings in the caves of Lascaux, Trois-Frères, and Grotte Chauvet in southwestern France and the 40,000-year-old drawings in northwestern Spain's El Castillo and Altamira caves are fascinating both in their artistry and in suggesting how people tens of thousands of years ago saw themselves and their world. Archeological studies, including gene mapping and evolutionary ecology of human remains, tell something about their skills and crafts. Pollen analysis (palynology) provides evidence about the health and nutrition of people before the last Ice Age, but we have only vague clues about their changing social organization and cultural forms.

After the last Ice Age, many human groups began to cultivate their food rather than relying only on foraging and hunting. Horticulture, or the application of basic farming techniques, provided more predictable nutrition and an opportunity for at least a partially sedentary life. Animals were domesticated, and seeds from plants that best met the needs of people were saved and planted. Living a portion or all of the year in one place, people honed the skills—particularly woodworking, weaving, pottery, and metallurgy—to create the technologies for settled living. And many of these included their emerging visual arts.

Over the next several thousands of years a greater, predictable food supply not only supported more people but made possible and necessary many new social forms. Because a marginal surplus of food meant that not everyone needed to produce food, a very small portion of the people could specialize in religious practices, material crafts, and soldiering. It also opened up new opportunities for inequality beyond physical prowess; some could accumulate the surplus and use it as a source of power over others.

Statecraft, writing, long-distance commerce, and the arts of war were developed in the first Bronze Age civilizations (2600 BCE to 1900 BCE). Empires of conquest, trade, and colonization grew and thrived in China, the fertile Indus Valley of southern India, the Tigris-Euphrates River Valley of present-day Iran and Turkey, and Minoan, Mycenaean, and Pharaonic Kingdoms of the eastern Mediterranean. This facilitated the spread of languages, belief systems, technology, and forms of governance and brought

into contact diverse cultures and social formations. Vibrant and immensely creative worlds—in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Central and South America—reflected human ingenuity and created new needs, ways of seeing, and belief systems.

New Forms of Production and the Development of Capitalism

Most social historians designate the fifteenth century CE as the point when social change speeded up and modern times began. This was driven by two "master processes . . . the development of capitalism and the formation of powerful, connected national states" (Tilly 1984: 15).

Prior to the fifteenth century, those with enough power to coerce others relied on tribute (taxes) to support themselves, pay for building projects, and fund military engagements. The empires of the Mughals, the Romans, the Muslims, the Ottomans, and others did little to alter the ways of material life of the majority of people under their control. The empire's interest was in physical security for its capital and major cities, uncontested control of trade in its domain, and the extraction of goods and taxes from its subjects through a network of governors and tax officials exercising "tributary power" (Wolf 1982: 85).

One of the social sciences' most gifted early practitioners, Max Weber (1864–1918), examined early capitalism as practiced wherever "the possibilities of exchange, money economy, and money financing have been present," including the Chinese and Roman empires (Weber 1964: 279). Of greater interest to him, however, was the first modern version of mercantile capitalism, initially practiced in parts of Europe around 1500 and characterized by rational behavior in finance, ownership, trading, and marketing. It organized production for profit. Going beyond simply owning *things* or taking possession of what others created, mercantile capitalism increased the value of goods (wealth) by relocating them closer to markets. By the fifteenth century and continuing well into the eighteenth century, trade routes became the major focus of a burgeoning capacity to extract and create wealth.

It is sometimes difficult to distinguish mercantile capitalism from plunder capitalism, especially when those who resisted trading with European merchants and states were met with armed violence. The British East India Trading Company (as well as the French, Portuguese, Swedish, and Danish East India companies), in the process of amassing fortunes, violently subjugated indigenous people who tried to maintain their sovereignty and way of life against the traders' encroachments. As will be seen in Chapters 4

and 7, at first trading companies had their own armed mercenaries, but they were increasingly aided by their respective governments, and in time many became state corporations.

Among the most important mercantile systems was the triangle trade between England, Africa, and the New World. The death of slaves from the brutal conditions of labor on sugar cane plantations in the Caribbean and South America required the continual importation of new slaves from West Africa. Ships loaded with cloth, hand tools, and weapons were sent from England to trade for slaves. Human beings, captured and sold into slavery, were deposited in the New World where they became plantation labor. The ships returned to England with sugar that sold for a high price. Much of the sugar was made into alcoholic drink and consumed by the growing, impoverished urban poor whose families had been small farmers.

By 1700, the declining rural standard of living—in part because of the consolidation of land and creation of sheep pastures that accompanied the rise of the wool industry—made rural families eager for any source of income. Some peasants turned their homes into workshops (hence the term *cottage industry*) that processed and spun thread and wove woolen cloth under contracts with merchants. The capital accumulation from this arrangement in time allowed merchants to shift the work to new urban factories. These could be powered by water and, with increasing technological sophistication, steam, radically changing the organization of labor.[26]

Eric Wolf sums up the transformations in capitalism, culminating in an industrial revolution, by emphasizing not only the accumulation of capital but technology as the critical factor driving social change. "Technology and labor power were subjected to the calculus of creating surplus value. The result was to speed up the pace of technological change" (Wolf 1982: 267).

The problem of funds to run the state and pursue its ambitions required an ever-growing economy. This gave an advantage to mercantile, and later industrial, capitalists who needed the state's legal and coercive power. Legal

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[26]Industrial capitalism and the first factories began the process of proletarianization, relocating people's place of work to large-scale production sites where, for a specified amount of labor time, they received a wage. Many factories retained the shop-oriented work teams headed by master craftsmen who did their own hiring, owned their tools, and possessed the knowledge of production. By the late nineteenth century and the advent of assembly line production, this, too, was changing. Today, most people who make things or provide a service accept the arrangements of workplace hierarchy and control and would be offended to be called proletarians rather than employees or associates.

protections in the form of corporate laws, agreements on taxation, and the state's provision of protection against worker unrest and foreign confiscation were brokered to benefit economic elites in exchange for their keeping the state well funded (Tilly 1992: 195–197).

Over the course of the nineteenth century, nearly all of the world's people encountered colonial incursions, first by European nations and then by the United States, Japan, and China. Their ability to do this rested heavily on superior technologies, especially technologies of transportation, communication, and coercion. Under colonial rule, regions of the world were transformed into satellites of the colonial powers in order to provide raw materials and, in some cases, finished goods that were the exclusive property of the colonial power.[27]

Emergence of the National State

Charles Tilly's (1984) second "master process" is the growth of the national state as the dominant form of political organization. The national state—unlike empires—was much more active in remaking the life of the people over which it held control in order to solve several economic and political problems. Because it was deeply involved in the expensive activity of making war, the national state could purchase an army, but this became prohibitively expensive. It could conscript an army, but resistance would in time erode the legitimacy of the state. A better solution was to emphasize a common national identity through the adoption of a single language and support for a state religion. Creating a national "imagined community"—in Benedict Anderson's (1983) phrase—of personal attachments and social unity allowed the state to enlist loyalty and patriotism of its subjects. This approach, however, was not without costs.

A bargain had to be struck with the citizens of the national state that gave them at least the sense of security, justice, and equality of rights as well as a voice in the country's affairs—the basic elements of political democracy. Subject people were in turn expected to respect the state's laws, pay taxes, and help fight its wars. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries ushered in the idea of social democracy that included a broader agenda of social welfare and improvements in people's quality of life. This expansion

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[27]By 1886, Europe's Berlin Conference had divided the entire African continent into colonial holdings, divisions that became de facto national borders in the two decades of independence movements following the Second World War (see Hobsbawm 1994: Chapter 12).

of the state was loudly debated throughout the twentieth century and remains among the most contentious divides in the ideologies of democratic nations today.

Modern capitalism's dominant organizational form and most powerful agent, the large corporation, is the subject of Chapter 7. The strong national state—whether guided by an elite that authoritatively directs an agenda of social improvement or by a contest among economic elites and average citizens for the use of state power, is the subject of Chapter 8.

Iris Summers' Time and Place in Global Context

A commonplace observation is that the nineteenth century was the European century and the twentieth century was the American century. Some suggest that the twenty-first century may belong to another nation or continent such as China or Asia. Such statements are simplifications if the intention is to imply that whatever happened of significance happened in only one part of the world. More often the implication is that power—economic, political, and cultural—is concentrated in one part of the world and then shifts elsewhere. Europeans would be hard pressed to accede the twentieth century to the United States, and the historical record bears them out. By the same token, Latin America, South and East Asia, Russia, and Africa were hardly standing still the past two hundred years. There was plenty of power and influence being exerted throughout the world in pursuit of territory, economic advantage, natural resources, security, and the intention to dominate, exploit, and change.

Many of the major forces of global social transformation in your life have their origin or were significantly developed in the centuries before you were born. Global trade intensified in the nineteenth century and was the source of several wars between alliances of European nations. The first industrial age, powered by the steam engine, emerged first in England in the late eighteenth century and soon took hold throughout Europe, the United States, and Canada. This shaped the lives of much of the population—in the kind of work people did, where they lived, family life, and the kinds of social inequalities that justified privilege and excused poverty.

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century colonization and client states were central to both economic expansion throughout Europe and the transformation of nonindustrial societies. The consolidation of territory and

nation building gave industrialized nations unrivaled global authority. The corporate form allowed private companies, backed by state power, to form armies that forced others to participate in European economies. Invention, the diffusion of technology, and the impetus to engineer new possibilities for commerce and war accelerated change in material, political, economic, and cultural life worldwide.

More than a hundred years later many of these same forces are driving social change. The concentration of economic power and capital in multinational corporations and the global pursuit of earth resources, foodstuffs, a pliable workforce, and eager consumers now go by the name of economic globalization. Global military expenditures to ensure access to oil and other earth resources are at an all-time high, despite the decline in the Cold War great power rivalry between the United States and now defunct Soviet Union. Nuclear weapons remain available to obliterate much of the Earth.

The capability of information to influence social change, especially when used by social movements for political change, has never been more potent, whether the information is rumor or fact. What is new is the speed and immediacy of digital information, including images and sound, and the almost instantaneous dissemination of it around the world. Amid the Iranian protesters' street marches in 2009, a young woman, Neda Agha-Soltan, was shot and killed. Her death was captured by two cell phone users, one of whom sent the two-megabyte file to an Iranian exile living in the Netherlands. She then posted the video on Facebook, and it quickly proliferated on YouTube where it was picked up by CNN and broadcast worldwide (Stelter and Stone 2009). This was something new and immensely powerful.

A More Crowded World

It is difficult not to be startled at the most basic facts about human population growth. The number of people living on the planet was possibly as few as one million (the population of Montana) in 10,000 BCE and had probably been about that number for hundreds of millennia. Ten thousand years later, the world's population had grown to 200–300 million people, about 3 percent of today's global population. In the next centuries, the number of people continued to grow, and it doubled by 1000 CE to about 600 million. It doubled again by the time the U.S. Constitution was ratified. It took human beings 250,000 years, but by 1800 the total number of people living on Earth reached 1,000 million—that is, a billion people.

In another one hundred and thirty years (1927) the world's population reached two billion. That was about the time Iris Summers was starting high school. During her lifetime, the world's population nearly tripled. It grew to three billion in 1959, four billion in 1975, and five billion in 1989. It was six billion in 2000, and seven billion people twelve years later. It will be more than eight billion by 2030. The world's population first grew rapidly in Europe, North America, and Japan. Population growth came later in less industrialized parts of the world and in regions that had been colonial holdings, such as the Philippines, South Asia, Kenya, and Algeria. Since 1950, population growth in China and South Asia, Latin America, and Africa has posed an enormous challenge to the economies and environments in those regions.[28]

When Iris Summers was a baby, a hundred years ago, the U.S. population was less than 100 hundred million. It now stands at well over 300 million. More than half of all people who have ever lived in the U.S. are alive today.[29] Over the decades thousands of small towns declined, disappeared, or were absorbed into expanding cities, while small cities became massive metropolises. Not only did the number of people increase, but their consumption of natural resources, especially energy and water, went up dramatically. Globally the same thing happened. A steady rural-to-urban migration created large cities, with millions of people living in vast slums, squatter communities, shantytowns, *favelas,* and *barrios* ringing the urban core. Improving their lot and giving them opportunities to live a decent life is an enormous undertaking that will challenge everything we believe about sustainability, social justice, and the global community.

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[28] Globally, the average number of children born to a woman fell from 5 in 1950 to 2.5 in 2013. Each year 140 million people are born. This looks like a frightening number, but it was 173 million fifteen years ago, and the number of people dying annually, currently about 57 million, is increasing. As a consequence, global population growth is slowing. The UN's population study division predicts population will rise to 10.9 billion by 2100, a 1.8 billion increase over its prediction four years earlier, largely as a result of lower-than-anticipated declines in fertility in the world's poorest countries. This prediction has been challenged by many experts who believe world population will peak at less than 9 billion around 2040–2055 and decline by the end of the century (see UN 2013; Norris 2013).

[29] A popular bit of trivia is that over half of all people who ever lived on the Earth are alive today. Wrong! This is a reminder that not all information is created equal (see Curtin 2007).

DO POPULATION DYNAMICS DRIVE SOCIAL CHANGE?

Is population itself a driver of social change? Many demographers—that is, people who study population trends and population geography—treat "population pressure" as a force influencing social change. Paul Ehrlich, author of *The Population Bomb*, and others who find global population growth alarming see it as an impending disaster, somewhat akin to the well-known prediction of inevitable starvation made nearly two hundred years ago by the clergyman Thomas Malthus.[30]

Malthus' prediction has not been realized, though massive famines have happened and most countries have taken steps to reduce population growth (e.g., China's one-child policy). Globally, growth rates are dropping precipitously. In European countries, Russia, Japan, several Latin American countries, and the United States, the fertility rate is below the replacement level of 2.1 births per woman. Annual world population growth is expected to decline from 1.3 percent to barely .3 percent by 2050.

Is this change in population growth driving social change, or is it a trend in need of explanation? There are many contributing factors, including the increased availability of birth control, an improved standard of living, government antinatalist policies penalizing large or favoring small families, and improvements in the education and status of women. Fewer children born, in turn, contributes to changes both personal and societal, for example a reduced dependency ratio (the number of productive adults to young and old dependents) that challenges national social security systems.

The U.S. population grew, in part, because Americans can expect to live thirty years longer than in 1900 when life expectancy at birth was 47.3 years. Children under the age of five accounted for 30 percent of all deaths in 1900, and now they are less than 2 percent. These are features of change to be explained. What drove these changes?

In the late 1800s, cities in the United States adopted programs and regulations that led to improved housing and reduced overcrowding. As discussed in Chapter 8, public health and sanitation measures reduced

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[30]Malthus urged "positive measures," and particularly abstinence on the part of the lower classes, in order to delay the inevitable day that population would outstrip the food available to sustain the world's population. He doubted this delay would actually happen, however, and believed a day would come when there was not enough food to support the population, resulting in mass famine. Malthus' is what I call the "cataclysmic vision" in Chapter 9.

waterborne diseases like cholera. Vaccination programs, beginning with smallpox in 1900, greatly reduced communicable diseases. The most deadly diseases in 1900 were pneumonia and tuberculosis; these have been successfully treated with antibiotics since the 1940s. The application of state resources and science drove these actions, dramatically reducing mortality.

The forces impelling population change and demographic shifts are complex and intertwined. The study of social change in most cases treats population dynamics as part of the social change process, a subject to be explained rather than a driver of social change.

The More Things Change . . .

Social change proceeds neither at a constant speed nor in a straight line. It has been described as linear, cyclic, and pendular. One of the more surprising features in twentieth-century social history, revealed in the life of Iris Summers, is the return by the beginning of the twenty-first century to many of the features of a hundred years earlier. Certainly much has changed, as her life story reveals, but there are aspects of her early life more similar to that of young people today than young people sixty years ago.

When Iris and Frank Summers married, the average age of marriage in the U.S. was six years later than it would be in the 1950s—and that later age of marriage holds true again today. A hundred years ago as well as today, more people were living in multigenerational households, with adult children residing with their parents even after becoming parents themselves, than was the case at midcentury. There is considerable personal uncertainty about financial security, and the ethos of material accumulation and consumption is tempered by the ideas of conservation and sustainability. In Iris Summers' experience, this came from growing up with less, while today it stems from stagnant incomes and a concern for the well-being of the environment and the Earth that future generations will inherit.

The most important swing of the pendulum in the United States—back and forth over the century—was the gap between rich and poor. It was wide at the start of the twentieth century and remained wide into the Great Depression. The industrial buildup for World War II, postwar economic prosperity, government taxation policies, strong labor unions, and a rising minimum wage "lifted all boats" over the next decades, expanding the middle class and narrowing the income gap. After 1970, however, the

pendulum began to swing back. An economic slowdown in the 1970s was followed by minor recessions in each succeeding decade, and the Great Recession of 2007–2010 struck hard. The declining strength of labor unions, a low-wage labor market, global competition that caused manufacturers to close shop in the United States and set up production overseas, and the growth of the financial sector in the American economy all increased the division between rich and poor and set the stage for a declining middle class.[31] Today, income and wealth inequality in the United States is greater than in any other industrialized country and is greater than it has been since Iris Summers was a girl.

Drivers of Social Change

The story of Iris Summers' life and times highlights the things that most strongly affect social change. These are the topics of Chapters 4 through 8. Robert Merton, a major twentieth-century sociologist, called these "social mechanisms," that is, "social processes having designated consequences" (Merton 1968: 43–44). They can also be thought of as drivers of social change or major forces to which social change can be attributed.

The five drivers or mechanisms are often themselves the outcome of changing circumstances, and so it is a mistake to imagine that social life is unchanging until one of these mechanisms kicks in. Equally erroneous is to think that they act independently, that social change is the result of one or the other of the mechanisms. They often work in tandem or sequentially. Studying them in each chapter is only a means to thinking about and under-standing the way one or more of the drivers influences the speed, direction, and scope of social change. Understanding them helps unscramble situations of social change that might otherwise seem perplexing or totally inexplicable.

Chapters 2 and 3 address two questions prior to studying the mechanisms or drivers of social change: How do we recognize social change? How do we understand social change? In a more formal presentation, these would be chapters on methods and theory, two staples of social science that are the

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[31]A stark example is Seattle (King County), Washington. "From 1999 to 2012 . . . 95 percent of the new households in King County have been either rich or poor, earning more than $125,000 a year or less than $33,000, with hardly anything in between. 'It's people doing really well, and people making espresso for people who are doing really well'" (Johnson 2015: 14, quoting Dow Constantine, a county executive).

foundation of its accomplishments. Entire careers of academic professionals are devoted to one or another of these topics, but most students new to the study of social change would rather skip them. That would be a mistake. It doesn't take long to recognize how befuddled and frustrating inquiry becomes without some guidance in working through a maze of information and ideas. Everyone needs what Charles Hampden-Turner (1970) calls the toolbox of research methods and theory. These chapters provide a few basic tools.

Chapter 4 discusses social change due to new knowledge and ways of applying knowledge to the solution of problems. This is the general concept of technology and includes science, discovery, invention, and new applications of existing techniques. Much social change associated with technology occurs through processes of diffusion from the point of origin, adoption, and creative adaptations in order to solve problems, to say nothing of the problems new technologies create. Technology has a long history, but for the past half millennium it has proliferated, proving to be a very powerful and transformative force.

Chapter 5 explores the way people challenge authority and mobilize for social change. Social movements grow out of grievances that impel people to join together in diagnosing a problem and proposing a solution toward which the social movement devotes resources. One of the most fascinating aspects of social movements is the framing process—putting forth a perspective that recommends a course of action and motivates participant involvement. Why so many social movements focus on enlisting the state and, increasingly, on the abuses of corporations is part of the story of modern social movements, from suffrage to unionization, civil rights, the environmental movement, and movements for democracy globally.

Chapter 6 takes a sobering view of transformation through war and revolution. The third driver of social change is international war and other coercive conflicts carried out by nations, groups within nations, and stateless groups. The chapter concentrates on the way societies and people's lives change in preparation for war, during wartime, and in the aftermath of war. It looks at revolutions and their sources—and the conflicts they spawn—as sources of change, as well as the counterrevolutionary forces that try to suppress them. Diplomacy and international organizations provide mechanisms and frameworks that resist war and pursue peace, holding out hope for the diminution of war as a driver of social change.

Chapter 7 looks at the making, selling, buying, and consuming of the things that pervade our lives. The fourth driver of social change is the actions of large corporations and their role in modern societies. This social change is rarely planned, but its cumulative effect has transformed economies,

cultures, personal identities, and the relationships of everyday life. It sometimes seems that the power to create goods and services, as well as our sense of what we need, rivals the power of nature. The work we do, the health of our communities, our sense of well-being, and avenues to realize our life's dreams are tied to corporate decisions. The influence and power of large corporations is a story critical to any understanding of social change.

Chapter 8 examines social change through the use of common resources and collective power. The fifth driver of social change is the state. Whether authoritarian or democratic, what modern states seek to accomplish affects everyone. This chapter examines how this is done and why, by telling the stories of several state actions in the United States and then focusing on modern China's efforts to become a major economic power.

Chapter 9 takes up what many students want when they originally venture into the topic of social change: they want to change things. After offering three visions of the future and a look at prediction and futurology, the chapter encapsulates much of what has been discussed in earlier chapters about making social change happen, whether this is done through your work life or as a member of a community. This final chapter stresses the importance of awareness, engagement, leadership, and taking responsibility for your actions in order to make a positive difference.

Topics for Discussion and Activities for Further Study

Topics for Discussion

1. As a thought experiment, imagine a tremendous decline in global population. Would social change go backward, returning to bygone days? What would be the main challenges of a smaller population in a world that is trying to accommodate nearly seven billion people today? At first glance, this might seem like a very positive prospect. Is it?

2. I sometimes wonder if information technologies, and especially the Internet and smartphones, have expanded the world for my students or given them a portal into a narrower, self-absorbed world. Have these technologies caused the world to get larger in terms of how people live and think about their lives? What other things, not discussed in this chapter, make the world larger, smaller, more diverse, and less diverse?

3. Charles Tilly's two master narratives cover a lot of ground in describing five hundred years of social change. What might be left out? There was a radical change in religious thought, from Luther to liberation theology. Could this be a third master narrative?

4. Some students are from rural areas and some from urban areas. Because the shift from rural to urban was so critical in contemporary social change, explore the differences between the two—some of which are described in this chapter—and their significance. Do you think the rural/urban divide is as important or obvious as it once was? Could millions of people choose to return to a rural life of a bygone era? What are the obstacles? What are the benefits of this happening?

5. Some students may have a difficult time identifying with Iris Summers. She was not strongly religious, not a person of color, an immigrant, lesbian, or a person with disabilities or special needs. How might her life story have been different had she been any of these? She lived only a few years in a city, never went to jail, and spent her adult life as an accomplished wife and mother. While her life illustrates the power of war, large corporations, science and technology, the state, and social movements, what does her life leave out of the picture of social change?

Activities for Further Study

1. Have a conversation with someone in your family, a close friend, or someone you're comfortable talking to who is more than sixty years old. Ask him or her to describe the three or four most important social changes in his or her lifetime. Discuss these with him or her: Why are they important? What were their causes? How have they affected the person you are talking to, even if they are not aware of it? Present this to the class.

2. Take a few minutes and read a good newspaper. Make a list of the social changes described and discussed in one day's reporting. What data are cited? Why are these changes newsworthy? Don't just look at rioting in the streets and civil wars. Look at what's happening in business, science and technology, the arts, gender relations, health and medicine, and even sports.

3. Collect words, especially old (archaic) words that tell you about social change. Most obvious are words for technology and equipment. Who talks about typewriters, slide photos, or scythes these days? What about food? With the typical family eating 40 percent of their meals outside the home, has the language of cooking and meals changed? How about warfare? What do "interdiction" and "counterinsurgency" say about war in the twenty-first century? What of the language of social networking? Try to explain the social changes in the words you collect.

4. This chapter provides a lot of examples of social change during Iris Summers' life and beyond, such as rates of sexual intimacy, who completes high school, and how long people live. Research other changes. Collect data to illustrate trends or rates of change. As an added challenge, do this not for the U.S. but for another country, perhaps a country you'd like to visit or where you'd like to live someday.

5. Go to a library that has a collection of popular magazines going back at least fifty, and preferably seventy-five, years or more. Read enough in them to imagine actually living in the years the magazines were published. How would you be a different person? What thoughts would you not have? What would you not be doing? How would your view of life and the future be different from what they are now?