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The Decline of Community in Zinacantan

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The first examines the process of commoditization and class formation. Mamdani shows how the response to these changes created ecological and population problems as the rural population adopted strategies for their individual survival. The second study by Allen is a detailed look at the health practices and beliefs of villagers returning from exile in Sudan. He argues that the pluralistic approach to health that they used provided an important element of community cohesion as well as an accommodation to Western health practice. Although underdeveloped, Allen highlights the importance of cultural analysis for understanding community adaptation.

In the final section of the book, the results of attempts to reduce rural poverty "from above" and "from below" are examined. Crow explores why action from above is rarely successful in reducing rural poverty. He concludes that nongovernmental organizations offer the best hope for reform from above, but even they are severely constrained by their frequent dependence on government for recognition and finance. Johnson concludes the book with an examination of action from below. She closes on an equivocal note, acknowledging that the empowerment of local people is a key to improving rural livelihoods but recognizing that it can be easily subverted by the need for liaisons with external organizations.

The authors have clearly satisfied the basic requirements of a good textbook. The major theoretical concepts are clearly discussed (usually in text boxes), the objectives of each chapter are identified, and summaries are provided for both chapters and sections. The statements of objectives in the form of questions are particularly useful since they provide a good basis for both study and research. The liberal use of photographs, maps, graphs, and tables enhances the amount of information provided without overwhelming the reader. The mixture of theoretical discussion, historical description, and research data makes this text useful for a broad range of subject material including development studies, social planning, sociology, anthropology, history, geography, economy, and political science.

—William C. Reimer
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Between 1960 and 1987, the period covered by this book, a petroleum-driven economic boom brought profound changes to parts of rural Mexico. Cancian traces the economic, political, and social changes
that occurred in a rural municipio (township) in the southern state of Chiapas. This area has been under the anthropological microscope since the Harvard Chiapas Project began in 1957. Therefore, this book does not stand alone but joins a long line of scholarly works. Cancian connects it to that line at various points.

In the early 1960s, Zinacantán was an isolated community of peasant corn farmers, whose distinctive dress set them apart and whose attention was focused on local affairs. Theirs was a subsistence economy with minimal commerce and an elaborate cargo system of intertwined political and religious responsibilities. During the 1970s, a familiar litany of changes occurred in rapid succession. Roads and transportation improved substantially and outside work opportunities became available. Subsistence corn plots became secondary to outside economic activities for many males. Also, as the population increased, fertile land became increasingly scarce.

Village men entered a variety of occupations which predictably led to a loosening of ties to the old customs. The distinctive local costume was dropped in favor of Western dress and consumption patterns changed as the economy was monetized. Political alliances broadened and service in the religious cargo system changed. Cancian deftly documents the various changes with both quantitative and qualitative data. The latter provide the rich texture that characterizes so much anthropological literature and makes it so readable. For example, chapter 4 chronicles the economic changes in a series of 11 biographical sketches which personalize the impacts of new occupations and opportunities.

After a period of close local control of political conflict, the dominant national political party, PRI, named a controversial mayoral candidate in 1976. For the next 10 years or more, open conflicts dominated the township's political life. Minor disputes could not be settled if the individuals belonged to different parties. Tax collection for fiestas broke down because people would not pay tax collectors from an opposing party. Access to every public service was strongly influenced by party membership. Factionalism pervaded the township—every household was forced to declare party loyalty and the communal system of fiesta sponsorship was undermined.

In the 1960s, participation in the cargo system was the major determinant of social status. The cargo system provided leadership and financial sponsors for the religious rituals of the community. There was an elaborate hierarchy of positions and responsibilities. The more and higher the positions occupied (which always involved commensurate time and financial commitments), the higher the person's social status. In the 1980s, cargos were still performed but economic and/or political success had also become major determinants of social status.

Cancian's separation of economic, political, and social systems for
analysis highlights their independence. At the same time, the various interconnections among the three emerge. This work provides rural sociologists with yet another well-documented, insightful case study of the modern industrial world impinging on a rural community. It is well organized, readable, and merits the attention of those interested in community change and economic development, especially in rural Latin America.

—Clyde Eastman
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The use of microcomputers increased rapidly in many African countries during the 1980s. Foreign assistance agencies (e.g., USAID, the World Bank) figured prominently in the financing of these microcomputers. Microcomputers have been promoted based on sometimes extravagant claims. Supporters have argued that the introduction of microcomputers would greatly enhance decision-making in the public and private sectors and would serve as tools of liberation with the potential to democratize the workplace and society in developing countries. This book serves as a corrective to an uncritical "technoidolatry" by placing the growth of microcomputers into its broader social and political context.

The book, which will be of great interest both to development specialists and to those interested in the sociology of technology, consists of seven chapters based primarily on case studies of the use of microcomputers in Sudan, Tanzania, Kenya, the Ivory Coast, and Zimbabwe. Although each chapter makes a contribution, I found the first and last chapters—which present syntheses rather than case studies—to be the most interesting. The introduction by Grant Lewis and Samoff sets the stage for the book by discussing, first, the economic context of Africa, including economic-development policies favored by international-development agencies, and then critiquing the mystique of microcomputers. This chapter does an effective job of creating skepticism that microcomputers have lived or even could live up to the promises made for them. It also directs our attention away from technical "how to" discussions and toward a greater understanding of the ways in which history, context, and politics may