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Injustice

The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt

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M. E. Sharpe INC., WHITE PLAINS, NEW YORK

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Preface

This is a book about why people so often put up with being the victims of their societies and why at other times they become very angry and try with passion and forcefulness to do something about their situation. For the most part, the book focuses on people at or near the bottom of the social order: those with little or no property, income, education, power, authority, or prestige. It tries to uncover how such people feel about and explain the circumstances of their lives. At the same time it searches for further reasons for their behavior. What are their notions of injustice and thereby of justice, and where do these ideas come from? Is there any central core of common or widely shared features in such conceptions, and if so, why? How and why have these conceptions varied among different groups of workers and what have been some of the most important historical trends that have affected them and can account for these variations?

For a time I thought of calling the book a study of moral outrage, making it an analysis of some of the social and historical conditions under which moral outrage did and did not put in an appearance. Many elements of this original concern remain in the book. But working through the evidence about the way people without much property or other social advantages actually felt and behaved led to a realization that the expression "moral outrage" failed to convey adequately what I was often finding. "Moral outrage" suggests too strongly the agonies of intellectuals trying to interpret, judge, and change the world. It smacks too much of the preacher. People of little education and