



Civilizing and Decivilizing Processes: Figurational Approaches to American Culture

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This volume collects new articles that explore the theoretical framework of figuralional or relational sociology as represented by Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu with regard to its relevance to American history, culture, and literature. The emphasis is put on Elias's theory of the 'civilizing process' and the question in how far his study of the European process of state formation and the correlative psycho-social changes is relevant to the analysis of the development of the American nation-state and the habitus of Americans. Leading scholars from the field of figuralional sociology team up with an international cast of renowned Americanists to shed new light on a variety of issues from the domains of social theory, cultural history, and literary criticism. With Elias as a guide, drinking and democracy in the early republic, nineteenth-century Indian boarding schools, the fear of slave insurrections, and the modern-day black ghetto appear as steps in an open-ended and non-teleological civilizing process that weaves together changes in habitus and social structure. Without stumbling into the pitfalls of an ideology of 'American exceptionalism,' the figuralional approach to American studies allows the contributors of this pioneering collection to give new answers to the tenacious question of the United States' peculiar characteristics. Adapting Elias's analyses to US-American conditions, the authors provide fresh impulses for theorizing civilizing and decivilizing processes, thus transforming the field of both American studies and figuralional sociology. The contributors are Jesse F. Battan, Christa Buschendorf, Rachel Hope Cleves, Winfried Fluck, Astrid Franke, Mary O. Furner, Guenter Leypoldt, Stephen Mennell, Ruxandra Radulescu, Kirsten Twelbeck, Johannes Voelz, Loic Wacquant, and Cas Wouters.

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