Our culture invests an impressive amount of capital in sexual science. We go to the "sexperts" the way earlier generations went to priests, ministers, and rabbis, hoping for answers to our questions about marriage, about lust, about whether to have children. We want quick and reassuring advice, with apparently objective scientific grounding, about impotence, heterosexuality, homosexuality, venereal disease, and now, in this age of AIDS, about even life and death. But when and why did a science of sex emerge, and what does its existence mean for our civilization? In this book, I have attempted to answer these questions by going back to some original sources in sexual, psychoanalytic, evolutionary, and economic theory that shaped the ideological climate in which we live. My argument is that sexology emerged during the transition from a protoindustrial culture of production to a mass industrial culture of consumption at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. In examining this transition I have identified two key tendencies associated with it: the breakdown of sexual difference and the relativization of sexual taste. The sexologists of that roughly fifty-year period, building on the epoch-making work of Charles Darwin, sought to fight these tendencies, even as they inadvertently furthered them. Con-
sequently, I believe, sexual science has come to be associated with what is ultimately a project for extending the democratic model of society to its furthest conceivable limit by abolishing the distinctions between adults and children and between male and female.

Readers will recognize that what insights I have about sexology depend on my understanding of that "science" in a much larger sociohistorical context. This perspective derives from several sources. I am, of course, much indebted to the work of Traian Stoianovich, especially the idea (implicit in my whole argument) that Western culture has unique structural and ideological characteristics such as feudalism which first appeared in Northwest Europe as early as the eleventh century. Within this theoretical framework, I have situated a tripartite periodization of Western culture drawn from American writers such as David Riesman and French writers such as Jean Baudrillard, who seem to distinguish consecutive "feudal," "productivist," and "consumerist" phases of that culture. Within this more elaborate theoretical context I have adopted two types of analytic technique: first, the individualist/holist distinction employed by Louis Dumont as well as by Marxists and by modernization theorists such as W. W. Rostow, who believe in progressive "stages of growth," and, second, the "deconstruction" perspective used by Michel Foucault and his followers. Indeed, Foucault's analytical techniques have been central in shaping my commitment to the historization of ideology which I place at the center of any attempt to create a new intellectual history.

To Traian Stoianovich, whose enthusiasm and support for my work have long sustained me, I owe a personal as well as an intellectual debt. John Gillis was immensely useful in offering suggestions, reading numerous drafts, and encouraging me to go on with my work when this project was still in its early stages. Nina Shapiro was instrumental in calling to my attention the contradictions of late nineteenth-century economic thought. By sharpening my perception of the economic, she enabled me better to understand the character of
Western intellectual history in general. Harold Poor has long been an interested and informative critic (in the best sense of the word) of my views on the “sexual question.” William Leach read several drafts of this work and especially encouraged me to link intellectual more thoroughly to social history. It was with this encouragement that I wrote Chapter 6. Peter Agree, my editor, has guided me through the long process of turning a manuscript into a book, patiently answering my questions and calming my fears. Finally, the late Warren Susman stimulated my interest in many of the issues raised in this work. First as a teacher and then as a friend, he provided both intellectual and spiritual inspiration. I will always cherish the memory of his kindness.

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