



## At Peril: Stories of Injustice

*Thomas J. Cottle*

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At its heart, this book is a collection of personal accounts that speak to a variety of social concerns, from youth crime and domestic violence to public education and health care. Told by children as well as adults, these stories offer illuminating if sometimes disturbing testimony about the circumstances of life in the contemporary United States. One story, for example, depicts the precarious world of a thirteen-year-old drug dealer. Another presents the searing narrative of a woman convicted of killing her abusive husband. Still another tells the painful saga of an "atomic" war veteran fighting the ravages of a disease induced and then denied by his own government.

If the stories gathered by Thomas J. Cottle seem removed from the experience of some Americans, his telling of them often blurs the line between the extraordinary and the ordinary. As he explains in his introduction, the rules and rituals, institutions and conventions that define our social life link us in a fragile web of interdependence, what Cottle calls "the ecology of peril." Viewed in this light, the lives we lead are all in some sense "at risk," ever vulnerable to the harsh vicissitudes of inequity and injustice.

Cottle organizes his narratives into four sections -- on the perils of health, family, school, and society at large. He concludes with an afterword that addresses some of the methodological issues raised by his approach. A blend of subjective insight and objective assessment, art and science, this book represents a vision of sociology as Cottle has practiced and refined it for more than thirty years. Alternately described as "story sociology" or "life study research," its aim is to recover the personal, human dimension so often overlooked in the scientific study of society.

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