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## PREFACE

This was almost the preface to a cookbook instead of a collection of ethnographies. The volume grew out of a graduate sociology seminar in participant observation. When the seminar ended, we decided to continue meeting informally over dinner to revise and rework our research projects into a book, and the menu became a barometer of our progress. When the writing was going well, we ate take-out. When we were having difficulty, however, the meals were sumptuous, and there were times when some of us wistfully considered abandoning the social sciences in favor of the culinary arts. But we helped each other through those rough spots, and two years (and many meals) after entering the field, we emerged with this collection of essays.

In truth, when we began the seminar in fall 1988, we were probably more qualified to be cooks than ethnographers. Only one of the twelve, all of us graduate students at the University of California at Berkeley, had ever done participant observation before. We had merely two weeks to select our sites and begin research, a time constraint that permitted neither a leisured nor circumspect entry into the field. Moreover, during the course of the seminar, the scope and direction of many of the projects changed. At the end of the semester most of us felt that our projects were far from complete, but by that time we had become committed to our research.

So we agreed to meet weekly at the home of Michael Burawoy. Perhaps it was the informality of the setting, perhaps the conviviality of the gatherings, or perhaps it was a growing interest in and dedication to one another's work. Whatever the reasons, we were fortunate to be graced with a highly collaborative and collegial working relationship. This spirit had been evident during the seminar, but it deepened over