

# Is the author of 'The Unheavenly City' really diabolical?

By Patricia McLaughlin

**O**N WEDNESDAY, September 12—a fine, golden, Indian summer day in Philadelphia—a column slugged “Communist viewpoint,” written by Bonnie Blustein, and titled “Banfield and Racism,” brought some sobering intelligence to the readers of the *Pennsylvania Voice*, the University’s #2 student newspaper.

It is a little hard to imagine Nazi professors teaching and hanging out at a nice campus like Penn [it began ominously]. It must have been hard to imagine in Munich in 1922, too, when German “race-scientists” began the propaganda for the Third Reich. But there is a good deal of evidence that a new wave of racism fully as virulent as the Nazis is again hitting the campuses. Edward Banfield, Kenan Professor of Political Science at Penn, is one of its nationally most prominent contributors. . . . Listen to one example: Banfield recommends that the government “encourage (or perhaps require) the lower class poor to reside in an institution or semi-institution” where they would “receive most of their income in kind rather than in cash,” would have to agree to have no more than two or three kids, and would be subjected to “surveillance and supervision from a semi-social-worker-semi-policeman.” (See Banfield’s book, *The Unheavenly City*, pp. 236-7 and 245-6; emphasis added.) Just to make it perfectly clear, Banfield asserts that “most lower class people in the large cities are black.” (p. 237) . . . He says that his proposals, like the one above, are “few and unsatisfactory as compared to what it would be nice to have happen or what one would do if one were dictator.” But, he stresses, most important is that “hardly any of the feasible measures are acceptable” to the public now (pp. 244-5). His aim is to make them acceptable to us by relying on racial and class prejudice. . . . There is evidence that Banfield is part of a racist offensive being organized by the billionaires and their politicians to keep black and white people fighting each other over a decreasing amount of crumbs. . . . Students and teachers can play a decisive role in stopping the use of the universities as breeding grounds for fascism and genocide. We should organize to get neo-Nazis like

## Could these wild accusations against Kenan Professor Edward Banfield possibly be true?

Banfield thrown the hell out of here. . . . The fact that Banfield looks, acts, talks, and dresses as a professor (not to mention getting paid as one) makes him more vicious and dangerous, not less. . . . He has been an advisor to Nixon and Agnew. This cannot be seen in the abstraction of an ivory tower. What is at stake is our future.

The column had to be significant—I could feel it in my bones. The only question was: significant of what? Could these wild allegations possibly be true? Ms. Blustein had hinted darkly at “considerable evidence.” It looked to be worth checking out.

A quick check revealed that Edward Christie Banfield, William R. Kenan Jr. Professor at the University for about a year, was neither teaching nor “hanging out” on campus on that particular golden September Wednesday. In fact, he was . . . nowhere to be found.

His office—the office on the third floor of the Fels Center, the one with the rumored shower and the surprisingly beautiful orange Moroccan rug—stood empty. Neither was Banfield to be found in his condominium on Rittenhouse Square, a place that looms large—and contradictorily—in his legend. It seemed, at the least, a curious coincidence.

At first, his office would say only that Professor Banfield was “out of town.” After some hard words and brandishings of a length of lead pipe, however, they were induced to admit that he was in East Montpelier, Vt.

Indeed. How exceedingly . . . curious. What, one wondered, would one of the nation’s leading urbanologists be likely to be doing socked away in a small town

in North-central Vermont—a town too small by half, in fact, to qualify as a proper city even by the Census Bureau’s arbitrary and rather peculiar standard which (as Banfield has himself admitted: see *The Unheavenly City*, p. 5) accounts any settlement of more than 2,500 souls a city in good standing?

A little further digging and pipe-brandishing turned up the suspicious fact that Banfield owned a 400-acre farm in East Montpelier.

Curiouser and curiouser. What, one wondered, would any respectable academic want with 400 acres of North-central Vermont? It would be hard to find a place with stonier soil, a shorter growing season, or more merciless winters—outside of North-central Iceland, anyway.

One highly-placed source revealed that Banfield was a member of the Advisory Committee to the Population Branch of the Census Bureau. Was he conducting some sinister sort of experimentation in population control up there in the frozen wastes of Vermont? Was that what Ms. Blustein meant when she hinted at genocide? Was that why population figures for Vermont’s Nesquehela Indians had fallen so precipitately? (See *Popular Demographics*, Volume XXXIV, Number 17, p. 212: “End of the Trail for the Proud Nesquehelas?”) Or was Banfield conspiring to have the Census Bureau’s already peculiar criterion for cityhood revised downward to drag East Montpelier into the Urban Crisis for perverse reasons known only to himself?

Or . . . Suddenly it all snapped into place. But, obviously. East Montpelier, Vt. . . . a place a million miles from nowhere . . . a place where the neighbors, acres and acres away to begin with, go to bed early and are unlikely to notice or comment on strange things that go BUMP in the night. BUMP///BUMP///BUMP///BUMP///BUMP///BUMP///BUMP. Whole concatenations of these odd, muffled BUMPs, leaping and echoing and concatenating off the Vermont hills and setting up the very weirdest,

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eeriest sort of racket . . . as the billionaires and their politicians parachute out of their Lear jets in the dead of night by the dark of the moon, whooshing down into Banfield's cornfields at a good speed, considerably faster than your average parachutist by reason of the pull—the fierce pull—exerted by the Forces of Gravity on the attaché cases packed with gold bars clutched in their bloodstained hands . . . And acres away, an insomniac farmer glances out his kitchen window to see a strange and wondrous sight: the sky over Banfield's cornfields is alight with a myriad of sparklings and twinklings and glitterings, a shower of coruscating twinkles raining down out of the sky: "The Martians?" he wonders. But it is only the pinky rings, the hundred venal diamond pinky rings of the billionaires and their politicians whooshing and swooshing down through the sky in a sort of demonic *son-et-lumiere*: "glitter-swoosh-twinkle-swoosh-sparkle-swoosh-BUMP." It is . . . a sort of Yankee *Berchtesgaden*: the billionaires and their politicians, limping in from the cornfields on their sprained ankles, dragging their parachutes and their gold bars, gathering in a smoke-filled, disused cabbage cellar, now converted into a War Room, sticking pins into maps, munching maple sugar candy, rubbing their hands together in a ghastly way . . . plotting their new racist offensive to keep black people and white people fighting each other over . . . a decreasing amount of crumbs! Is Father Coughlin in on this? And Banfield . . . no longer looking, acting, talking, and dressing like a professor . . . but resplendent in high shiny black boots . . . striding about in a menacing way and muttering in a vaguely familiar accent . . . "Ach! You Schwein!"

Ah . . . just a minute. Hasn't this gone far enough? Hasn't the point been made? Isn't it time to start asking some hard questions?

Some Hard Questions: Does Edward Banfield really want to intern the lower class in semi-institutions? What is his book about? Why is Bonnie Blustein so upset? What is the significance of her column? Why can it not be dismissed out of hand? Where does Plato fit in? What really goes on at the farm in East Montpelier?

To begin with the column: many people who have read Banfield's *The Unheavenly City*—and even many people who haven't—would be tempted to dismiss Ms. Blustein's column out of hand as either a wild misreading or a willful distortion of Banfield's analysis.

Many people would tend to dismiss out of hand anything titled "Communist viewpoint," or anything written by an

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avowed member of the Progressive Labor Party (a blurb avowed Ms. Blustein to be such), or anything which refers to skilled and unskilled laborers collectively as "the workers," as the column had done in its unexcerpted parts. I am not one of these people for rather idiosyncratic personal reasons. But there are limits, and I run smack into them when people start talking about the billionaires and their politicians.

Many people have the same problem, and find themselves unable to suppress snickers at any mention of sinister cabals of the billionaires. My friend Marianna de la Guerroniere Gardiner-Biddle (not her real name), for instance, when she got to the billionaires line, rolled her eyes and gave a mock-despairing billionaires-will-be-billionaires shrug and a couple of tsk-tsks. "Those billionaires!" she said. "At it again!"

Marianna has a couple of uncles who are billionaires, and it's been her observation that they can never agree with each other for long enough to plan a family picnic, not to mention being able to agree with a lot of other equally cantankerous billionaires long enough to plot a racist offensive, and besides, they're always too busy. If she had known that Banfield himself had come to almost identical conclusions in his rather more subtle analysis of the Chicago-is-run-by-four-rich-men theory (see *Political Influence*, p. 286 ff.), she would undoubtedly have found the situation even more ironic.

"You know what Walter Lippman said, don't you?" she asked.

I didn't.

"Walter Lippman said, 'I for one am not disposed to blame the politicians and the businessmen. They govern the nation, it is true, but they do it in a rather absent-minded fashion. Those revolutionists who see the misery of the country as a deliberate and fiendish plot overestimate the bad will, the intelligence, and the singleness of purpose in the ruling classes. Business and political leaders don't mean badly; the trouble with them is that most of the time they don't mean anything.'

"Lippman said that in 1913," Marianna said. "Daddy made me memorize it before I went away to school."

Of course, all that billionaires business is an easy enough mark anyway. What about encouraging (or requiring) the lower class poor to live in semi-institutions? Ms. Blustein said that Banfield recommends this, acknowledges that it is not now feasible, and aims to make it acceptable to us by relying on racial and class prejudice.

In fact, Banfield lists "encourage (or perhaps require) the lower class poor to reside in an institution or semi-institution" as one of 12 measures in the chapter titled "What Can Be Done?" (Rabid conservatives who find this phrasing suspiciously close to Lenin's celebrated "What Is To Be Done?" may submit columns lacerating Banfield to the *Pennsylvania Voice*.)

To say that Banfield lists these measures in a chapter titled "What Can Be Done?" is not at all the same as saying he recommends them, odd as that may sound. To understand the distinction, it helps to know what the book is about.

*The Unheavenly City* is Banfield's ninth and most recent book. Until he published it in 1970, Banfield was highly respected by other political scientists and pretty much unknown to most everybody else.

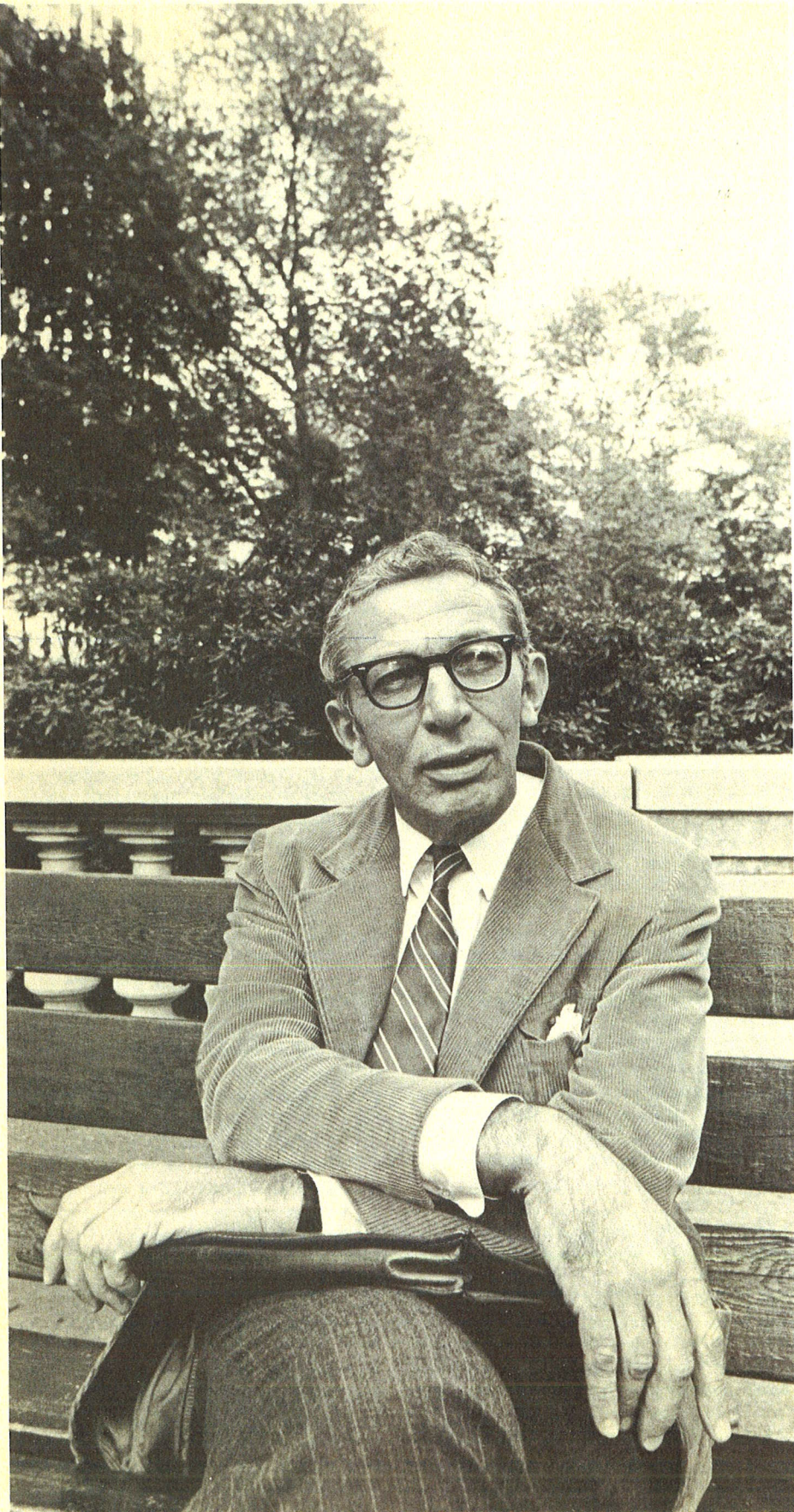
Several years ago when Dr. Erving Goffman, Benjamin Franklin Professor of Anthropology and Sociology at the University, sent Banfield a copy of his book, *Stigma*, he inscribed it, "To the Banfields, who have none. . . ."

That situation changed radically when *The Unheavenly City* hit the bookstores. For a book with 40 pages of footnotes, it produced an amazing hue and cry. Ms. Blustein's column, while it may be the first to come straight out and call Banfield a neo-Nazi, is not atypical of the press the book got.

Two things were odd about the general run of reviews. The first was the degree of passion: *The New York Times Book Review's* reviewer sounded absolutely breathless with outrage, as did many other reviewers. The other curious thing about the reviews was that, while a considerable number of the reviewers agreed that the book was loathsome, despicable, and dangerous, they disagreed violently on what was so despicable about it. In one view, Banfield was a racist. In another, he was not a racist at all; it was only the poor he despised. In yet another, what he said was essentially true, but he shouldn't have said it.

*The Unheavenly City* is subtitled "The Nature and the Future of Our Urban Crisis." The subtitle is ironic, since one of Banfield's first points is that there isn't any urban crisis. He points out, for





Ed Banfield, 'half farm boy,' in Philadelphia's cultivated Rittenhouse Square

instance, that when people cite with alarm the fact that 70% of the population now lives in cities, they do not mean that 70% of the population has moved to New York and Philadelphia. They mean that 70% of us now live in towns larger than East Montpelier, towns with populations of 2,500 or more—towns that are not most people's idea of urban crisis material.

He points out that, for all the talk of crisis, things are better now than they were at the turn of the century. He suggests that we now have an "Urban Crisis" mainly because things have not improved fast enough to keep pace with our expectations: we have defined a lot of things as social problems that were taken for granted 70 years ago. (When my grandfather dropped out of school in seventh grade in 1909, for instance, to support his widowed mother, four siblings, and six orphaned cousins, it occurred to no one that he was part of a "dropout problem," or that he was likely to end up "culturally deprived," or to suffer from growing up in a "matriarchal family." That was just the way life was.)

Banfield points out that something like 90% of the money "poured" into improving the cities has been spent on highway improvement and on urban renewal—and that improved highways facilitate the exodus to the suburbs and that urban renewal generally involves tearing down housing that the poor can afford to live in and building housing that they can't afford to live in.

Banfield points out that a large part of the urban crisis that is generally agreed to exist has to do with amenities—ugly downtowns, traffic jams, air and noise pollution, uncomfortable public transportation—that, while important, are not serious in the sense that they "affect either the essential welfare of individuals or what may be called the good health of society."

Banfield makes all these points in his introduction, and continues along the same line through the book to demonstrate that the urban crisis is not what most people assume it to be and that most of the measures they assume would "solve" it may well tend to make things worse. This is not the sort of performance calculated to endear one to the hearts of one's countrymen. People tend to grow very attached to their myths, and they don't much like having them made mincemeat of.

Banfield's view of class got him into a particular lot of trouble on this score. He defined class not in economic or social-status terms, but in cultural terms: in terms of the way people think. The

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linch-pin of class under these terms is a time horizon: the degree of your ability to envision and provide for a distant future, combined with a number of other associated ways of viewing particular aspects of the world, determines your class.

Thus, for Banfield the lower class is defined by its members' inability to envision a future or to defer present gratification to provide for it; their tendency to act on impulse; their lack of allegiance to the social order, tendency to resent authority, and inability to maintain stable relationships with other persons, groups, or institutions; their consequent unstable familial arrangements and haphazard child-raising patterns; their taste for "action," excitement, and violence; their tendency not to object to disorder and squalor. In less neutral language, the lower-class lacks character, taste, and the ability to get along with other people.

Although most people who fit the lower class description—it almost goes without saying—will be poor, Banfield was careful to point out that this is not to say that most poor people are lower class. And although he said that most members of the lower class in the large cities are black, he was likewise careful to point out that this is not to say that most black people—or even a large proportion of them—are lower class. According to his definition, he insisted, a slum-dweller might share the values, attitudes, and aspirations of the middle or upper classes and therefore be middle or upper class. It is more difficult to imagine that a rich person could share the values and attitudes of the lower class and stay rich for very long, but Banfield insisted it was at least theoretically possible.

The lower class, as Banfield saw it, represented a kind of pathology. People living according to its value structure would necessarily lead physically and emotionally impoverished lives, and would most likely be dangerous to their neighbors. A disproportionately high number of them would be diagnosed and treated for mental illness; a disproportionately high number of them would be convicted of crimes.

Although the lower class represented a very small proportion of the population, it would tend to be responsible for a relatively high proportion of the serious problems of the cities.

Banfield contended that the lower-class value structure constituted a culture. He was not, obviously, arguing that it constituted a culture in the word's sense of a group's reflective and adaptive response to its environment—in that sense, the values of the lower class, which are essentially non-reflective, and non-

## Banfield has an unusually high tolerance for the messy complexities of political reality

adaptive to the point of being suicidal, constitute more of an anti-culture. He was arguing that the lower-class culture is a culture in the sense of being a stable and interrelated set of dispositions and valuations through which its members viewed and dealt with the world they lived in. He was saying, in other words, that members of the lower class valued "action," excitement, violence, and immediate gratification, distrusted authority, and disbelieved in their power to have any effect on their future, in very much the same way that members of the middle class valued thrift, sobriety, and hard work, respected the law, believed in educating their children and doing good, and disbelieved in fairies. It would, he inferred, be no easier to persuade one group that its values were invalid than to convince the other that its were.

Assuming the stability of lower-class values, Banfield concluded that there was very little that could be done for members of the lower class. No amount of funding for job training, for instance, would be of any help to someone who could not be convinced that it was worth his while to acquire a skill, or to turn up for work at the same time every morning five days a week. At best, he concluded, it would take generations to have any significant impact on the lower-class value structure.

If there was little that could be done to help the lower class, there were, Banfield suggested, at least a few things that might be done to protect the rest of society from it. This is where the semi-institutions come in. Positing an acceptance of his previous analysis, Banfield lists 12 measures which are aimed at containing the anti-social behavior of the lower-class poor, socializing their children into the normal culture, and providing for the "competent poor" (those who are not lower class) by means of a negative income tax.

He does not actually recommend that these measures be implemented: in fact, he lists them mainly to give himself a chance to demonstrate why they cannot be implemented. The list is little more than an excuse for a discussion of what makes social policies politically acceptable or unacceptable.

To suggest, as Ms. Blustein does, that Banfield is currently engaged in a nefarious plot to make his measures seem acceptable to the American public is about as egregious an instance of point-missing as it would be to assume that Plato's discussion of the function of music and drama in the *Republic* was a veiled attempt to convince his government to censor Aeschylus.

In fact, the Platonic analogy carries further. The *Republic* is most often thought of as one of your standard, garden-variety political utopias: a scenario of the way the perfect political process, conceived according to Plato's metaphysics and ethics, would function. Like your standard, garden-variety utopia, it serves as a commentary on the imperfections of the real-world government under whose rule it was articulated—and on the imperfections of most of the other forms of government Plato could think of. By the end of the *Republic*, though, Plato has made two things clear: 1) that the Republic would be the perfect place to live if all his conditions were met, and 2) that, given the imperfect nature of man, and the messy way things work in the real world, it was entirely unlikely that those conditions *could* be met.

Banfield's prime academic interest, since he started studying sociology and political science and social and physical planning at the University of Chicago in 1947, has been in the nature of planning as a process of rational decision-making, and in the constraints imposed on it by political, social, and physical realities.

In *Political Influence*, his examination of the informal political structure of Chicago, for instance, Banfield is mainly interested in figuring out how things work. He is hardly interested at all in making recommendations about how they *ought* to work: he has an unusually high tolerance for the messy complexities of political reality, gives them more credit than most people would, and is as skeptical of the idea of political reform (or perhaps more so) as he is about most other things.

When Banfield lists his 12 measures, then, he is only setting the stage to launch into another discussion of the way political decisions are really made. Most of the measures will be politically unacceptable, he argues, because, on the one hand, they will be fiercely opposed by a number of special-interest groups, and because, on the other, they will conflict with the general American belief in social perfectibility and doing good—and therefore be unacceptable to public opinion.

Many of his critics, while understanding that his 12 measures were not meant as a political manifesto, suggested that it was evidence of some sort of moral laxity that he had not come up with a list of solutions that were both feasible and politically acceptable—that he was guilty, in other words, for *not* having written a political manifesto. The fact that real solutions—solutions that would turn members of the lower class into fine, upstanding middle-class citizens, for instance—were logically incompatible with his analysis did not, apparently, seem to them to be an acceptable excuse.

This is typical of the double and triple binds Banfield got into with his critics all down the line.

Middle-class reviewers, who would hardly be likely to work so hard at trying to help their children develop character, taste, the ability to get along with other people, and strong internal values if they thought these characteristics would develop on their own *ex nihilo*, were scandalized when Banfield asserted that there were people who lacked them.

Many people refused to believe Banfield meant it when he said the lower class was not coterminous with the black population, and therefore accused him of “patent racism.” Others insisted that he *did* mean it when he said lower class wasn’t equivalent to black, but refused to believe he meant lower class wasn’t equivalent to poor, and therefore accused him of despising the poor.

What upset people most, it seemed, was his insistence that lower-class values *were* values—and could not therefore be easily changed. Some people argued that this was not so. But those who seemed afraid that it *was* likely to be so were even angrier. The idea that things couldn’t be fixed seemed un-American.

What was puzzling about the brouhaha was that practically nothing Banfield had said was new.

Banfield’s description of the lower class, as he pointed out in some of the 40 pages of footnotes, represented the findings of several other sociologists. It also came close to representing what had been, until maybe 10 years ago, the conventional wisdom. Anybody’s grandmother could have told you that people live badly organized lives and often end up in jail because they have been badly brought up—or inadequately socialized, to make it sound more respectable.

But anybody’s grandmother could be dismissed. Banfield had to be met head-on. To begin with, he was a respectable scholar not a little old lady. Add to that the fact that he writes well, and clearly. “When you say things in a

## Banfield ended up with a sure, merciless eye for illusion and inconsistency

language that doesn’t put people off,” Banfield explains, “you become more of a threat to those who think that your position somehow undermines what they stand for. If somebody says exactly the same thing in a journal that nobody’s going to read and in a jargon that nobody *could* read—well, who *cares*, from a political standpoint, *what* he says, as long as he says it in Greek? But if he says it in plain English, and it’s advertised as being Nixon’s advisor or something like that—why, then it becomes a political event that has to be responded to politically. I had no intention of becoming a political event.”

The adman at his publisher’s had other ideas. His book jacket copy noted that Banfield had been chairman of the President’s Task Force on Model Cities. When Banfield saw it, he had it taken out—it had nothing to do with the book, he insisted. After he left, the adman put it back in. The book sold 225,000 copies, an amazing number for a book with 40 pages of footnotes.

The clarity of Banfield’s language and the Nixon connection and the book’s insistence that there are no quick solutions all undoubtedly explain a good deal of the outrage it generated. What may explain more of it is the quality of Banfield’s mind. Even more striking than his ability to measure the gaps between the way things might rationally be done and the way things really are done is his ability to spot and measure, down to the last millimeter, the gaps between the way things really are and the way people think they are.

It is, I think, clearly and entirely untrue that Banfield hates and wishes to oppress black people, or poor people, or even lower-class people. Banfield’s description of the lower class is quite sympathetic, though certainly not admiring, and those critics who found it hostile and moralistic may well have been projecting their own fear and hostility toward a value structure that seemed diametrically opposed to their own. What Banfield hates and wishes to suppress, the book’s tone makes quite clear, is fuzzy-minded people.

There are few things in the book that are very startling. In fact, it is full of

things that most people knew all along. But Banfield is very good at taking things that people knew all along and arranging them in such a way that it becomes clear that a lot of other things people also “knew” all along cannot also be true. He is not only very good at this sort of demythologizing, he seems to enjoy it. People do not much like having it slowly, and exquisitely, and with rigorous logic, demonstrated to them that they have been making a lot of dumb, unwarranted, unexamined assumptions, many of which are internally inconsistent. Banfield is probably lucky he wasn’t burned at the stake; a couple of centuries earlier, he would have been.

A lot of people will naturally refuse to see that their assumptions don’t hold up. But they will see it far enough to feel threatened and to start striking out in random directions, with accusations of racism and general wrong-headedness and lack of compassion.

Practically none of these accusations makes sense. The one about compassion, for instance: Banfield’s prose is uncompassionate only if compassion is assumed to require a lot of stylistic hand-wringing, a test which Hemingway’s prose fails as well. Accusations that Banfield is personally lacking in compassion amaze and anger his friends, who describe his generosity as something he ought to be protected from.

But none of these criticisms is really worth dealing with, because none of them is really about what it purports to be about. To the degree that Banfield lacks compassion, he lacks compassion not toward the book’s subjects but toward its readers. A lot of them clearly sensed this, and, combined with the fact that he was on the political Wrong Side to begin with, it drove them around the bend.

What is interesting, and worth dealing with, though probably not susceptible of being dealt with very well, is how Banfield ended up with such a sure, merciless eye for illusion and inconsistency. It shows in all his work, from his first journal article (an examination of a New Deal program which came to the conclusion that the program was positively counterproductive, and made him unwelcome in the Farm Security Administration where he was working), through a study of a small Italian village (which came to the conclusion that “this business about peasants in the literature is all nonsense”), through his books on urban politics, to *The Unheavenly City*.

When Banfield finished undergraduate work at the University of Connecticut (where he’d started in animal husbandry, switched to English Lit., and ended up

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editing the school newspaper), he went to New York to find a job as a reporter. *The New York Times* and everybody else within reach turned him down (1938 was a bad year to be looking for work). Banfield would have been good at journalism: like Thoreau, who talked about "traveling in Concord" and meant that you could learn things by looking at your surroundings as if they were a foreign country in which you had no stake, Banfield looks at things from outside, with a disabused eye.

"I don't know," he says. "It's awkward to talk about oneself this way because it's liable to sound fatuous—and, in fact, *be* fatuous—but I don't know what I can do: I think anyone who thinks at all thinks critically. The enterprise itself involves the risk of coming to conclusions that are hard to accept—hard for others to accept, but also hard for oneself to accept sometimes. But some people have a taste for this, some don't. I don't claim it as a virtue, but I think I always have tended to want to take received truths and turn them around and look at them from points of view that put them in a different light—and they sometimes don't seem to be true any more.

"If you want to make something of it," he says, "I suspect that being brought up in the Unitarian Church might have something to do with it—I'm a lapsed Unitarian, so to speak, because Unitarianism itself came to be the object of critical scrutiny by the time I got to the age of 16. But Unitarianism—at least the kind that prevailed at Hartford, which is the only kind I know anything about; I haven't been in a church since—was a very self-consciously critical exercise."

Another thing Banfield suspects may have contributed to his perspective was his marginality to a number of worlds. His father was a Connecticut farmer; his mother, whom he describes as "middle class—upward mobile, to use the sociological term," wanted her children to have the advantage of city schools, so the family lived in Hartford during the school year, and Banfield's father worked in a factory in the city, but commuted to the farm as well. He spent weekends and summers on the farm, and grew up halfway between the farm world and the city, halfway between the interests of his friends ("the kids on the street," as we called ourselves), and the books his mother read him, halfway between his inclination to be a farmer and his mother's idea that he ought to be a corporation lawyer.

When, after college, he ended up in a job with the New Hampshire Farm Bureau Federation," there again, I was

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in the position of being in, but not of, the farm world of New Hampshire. I was a bureaucrat in an office; I wasn't a farmer. And yet I spent most of my time with farmers and working on farm affairs. I think I could see things about farm life that I couldn't have seen if I hadn't been half city boy—and I could see things about city life that I couldn't have seen if I hadn't been half farm boy."

Banfield's marginality extends to academic disciplines. Although he took his Ph.D. in political science, with a concentration in sociology as well, during the time he was working on it he was teaching rural land-use planning. At that point, he had only a B.A. in English from Connecticut, but he had apparently picked up a lot of useful information in New Hampshire, and after that as information officer for the U. S. Farm Security Administration. Britton Harris, professor of city planning at the University, and one of Banfield's first students at Chicago, says his course was "probably the best course in planning I ever saw—it went to basic ideas, and caused people taking it to ask questions they wouldn't otherwise have asked."

Banfield's ability to discriminate between illusion and reality, and to keep the way he might want things to look from getting mixed up with the way they really do look—that is what it comes down to—extends beyond planning and the political process to the social sciences themselves. He seems immune to the occupational diseases that afflict many social scientists and lead them to engage in exercises in Pure Methodology. Banfield has a tendency to address only questions that interest him, which probably has a lot to do with why he writes interesting books.

But what about East Montpelier? What was he doing up there on September 12? Banfield's friends would have you believe that he would be likely to be doing nothing more nefarious than striding around his 400-acre farm, taking immense pleasure in the astringent autumn air, the leaves beginning to turn color, the tasks that need doing to brace the farm for the long winter ahead. Looking up occasionally to remark the V's of geese flying north and to check for signs

of a change in the weather. Looking down to contemplate the stony, inhospitable Vermont soil that has been farmed off and on for three centuries now and has never yielded anybody a great deal more than survival.

Ah, yes—it is very easy to wax Georgic and romantico-tragically profound about the rural aspect of Edward Banfield. Something about the uncompromising tone of his books rhymes well with the idea of Banfield as a spare, sere, thin-lipped Yankee farmer, and people are always getting carried away by it.

"He moves across Harvard Yard as if he would like to plant corn there," an editor of the *Atlantic* wrote, neglecting to say what in a man's walk would lead one to think he had corn-planting on his mind, and perhaps forgetting that a rural type like Banfield would likely know better than to try planting corn in the shade of all those fine old trees.

The attempt to fabricate some sort of obsessively rural mystique for Professor Banfield is only evidence of how difficult it seems to be for people to accept the man at face value, as a reasonably ordinary person with a salutary insistence on calling things by their right names, without some sort of myth to fit him in with their idea of reality, some sort of *explanation*. If there must be myths, it is at least somewhat more attractive to be portrayed as being in league with the Corn Goddess than to be assumed to be in league with the billionaires or the devil.

Speaking of which, Bonnie Blustein finally returned my phone call, which is a whole other story. Suffice it to say that she seemed to be entirely sincere—she actually *believed* all the things she'd written, as near as I could tell—which surprised me, since my sources in what used to be called The Movement assured me that the brightest radicals tended to end up in the Progressive Labor Party. Ms. Blustein did not sound stupid: she only sounded as if she had started from her conclusions, and worked backwards to set up her arguments. We talked for two hours, and by the end my very brain was buzzing with more half-perceived logical flimflams than I ever hope to encounter again. Toward the end, grasping at the question like a drowning man clutching at a raft, I asked her what she thought of Plato's *Republic*.

"I think Plato was a fascist," she said. "I was a philosophy major and I had to read all that stuff and I thought it was appalling."

I thanked her for calling back, hung up the phone, and fled out into Rittenhouse Square to rinse my buzzing brain in the fine, golden, Indian summer air.