

EDWARD C. BANFIELD:
AN APPRECIATION

THE HENRY SALVATORI CENTER
FOR THE STUDY OF INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM
IN THE MODERN WORLD

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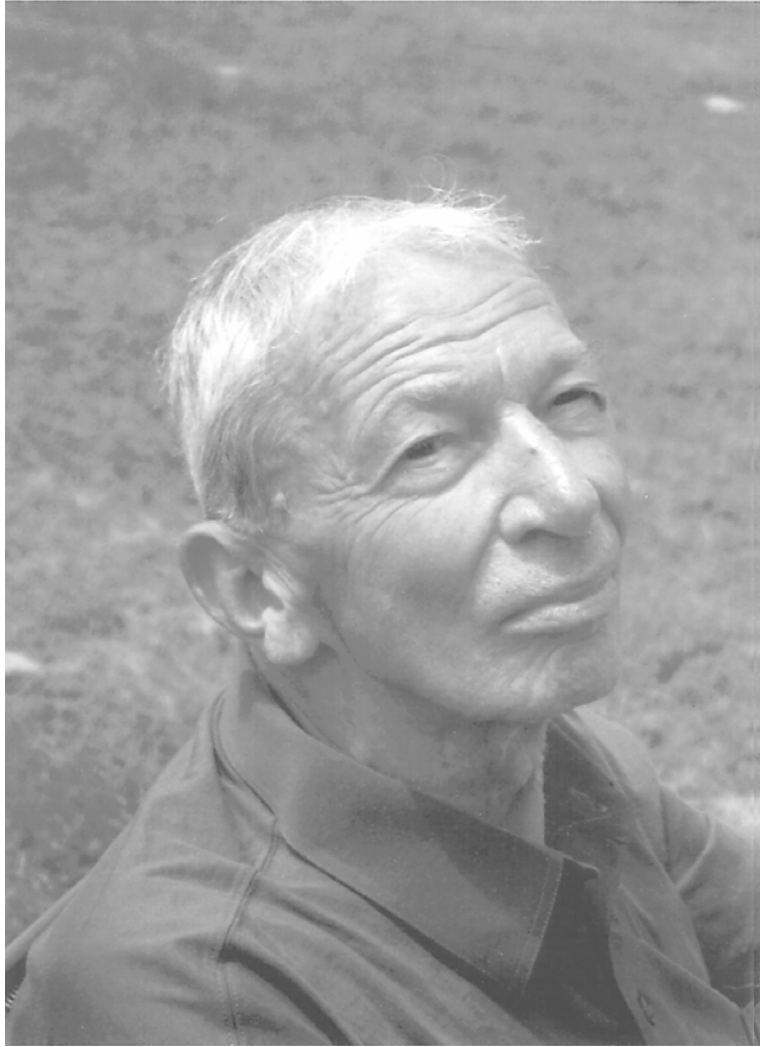
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INTRODUCTION

The work that follows is devoted to Edward C. Banfield, in more ways than one. To begin with, it contains the proceedings of a Henry Salvatori Center colloquium that discussed many of his writings and the significance of his lifework; a biographical sketch of him by James Q. Wilson, one of his first students and later his collaborator; and the first complete bibliography of Banfield's writings.

Perhaps more profoundly, this monograph is an expression of the gratitude and deep affection felt for Ed by his students and friends. Accordingly, it also includes obituaries of him, culled from many eminent journals, as well as the eulogies delivered on December 9, 1999, at Ed's memorial service at Harvard University, where he had been The George D. Markham Professor Emeritus of Government. Somehow, it seemed right to add to the collection the splendid tribute paid to him decades earlier on the occasion of his leaving the University of Chicago for Harvard, by his friend and colleague Leo Strauss.

Banfield was one of the greatest social scientists of the twentieth century. By education, he was a political scientist, but his temperament and curiosity led him far beyond the usual confines of that discipline. He borrowed freely from other social sciences and from history and political philosophy and literature. Like America's founders, he applied his formidable intelligence to the problem of the social or political limits of reason. Though he never disdained reason, he knew its weaknesses when confronted with human passions, interests, and habits. He studied, particularly, the cultural conditions that can assist or impede reason in inducing men to trust and cooperate with one another. In this vein, his work spoke directly to the Salvatori Center's main concern, the nature and pre-conditions of individual freedom. Freedom was too important, Banfield thought, to be left to the twentieth-century versions of "sophisters, economists, and

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calculators,” those pinchbeck rationalists who did not appreciate politics for what it is.

This monograph began life as a report on the Center’s colloquium on Banfield’s social science. Although he and his wife Laura had been invited to attend, Ed begged off on grounds of modesty and ill health. After his death only a few months later, the Center’s Board of Governors decided to expand the project into a general assessment of his life and work. On the Center’s behalf, I should like to thank the participants in that colloquium, many (but not all) of whom had studied with Ed, and especially Steven J. Lenzner, who composed the initial version of our discursive summary of its proceedings and who assembled Ed’s bibliography. In order to maintain the confidentiality necessary for a candid discussion, we chart the ebb and flow of the conversation in general terms, without identifying specific participants’ remarks. Special thanks are due to Ellis J. Alden, who extended to us the magnificent hospitality of his Monterey Plaza Hotel and Spa. His generosity helped to make this colloquium memorable and delightful.

My thanks also to the various individuals and organizations who gave permission to reprint their encomiums of Banfield; to James Q. Wilson for his loving biography; and to Thomas Karako, who prepared the materials for publication. Without a grant from the Philip M. McKenna Foundation and the support, financial and otherwise, of the Center’s Board of Governors, this monograph would not be possible. I am grateful to them all. Our hope is that this booklet will serve to reinvigorate the study of Edward C. Banfield’s writings and thought.

Charles R. Kesler
Director

Introduction

COLLOQUIUM

**Social Science and Contemporary
Political Life:**

**The Achievement of
Edward C. Banfield**

MONTEREY PLAZA HOTEL, MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA
MAY 6-8, 1999

FRIDAY, MAY 7: SESSIONS 1, 2, 3
SATURDAY, MAY 8: SESSIONS 4, 5, 6

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An Appreciation

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Colloquium

SESSION 1

**THE MORAL BASIS OF
A BACKWARD SOCIETY**

Readings: *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (1958), pp. 7-12, 83-120, 139-152.

The first session sought to lay the groundwork for an evaluation of Banfield's thought by examining one of his earliest books, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (1958). This influential writing—recently hailed by the political scientist Samuel Huntington as “a work for the ages”—examined life in a village in southern Italy that seemed surprisingly impervious to modernity.

At first, it was remarked, *Moral Basis* strikes the reader as the least Banfieldian of Banfield's works. The backward village of “Montegrano,” to which he subjected his family as well as himself for nine months, could not be more unlike the hyper-modern, large American cities that are the subject of his most famous works. How then does this early study shed light on Banfield's later writings? Indeed, is *Moral Basis* an appropriate place to begin the consideration of Banfield's achievement?

A number of participants set forth reasons that vindicated its selection. To begin, it was noted that Banfield had devoted considerable effort to studying communities that resisted modern “progress,” as well as to those at its forefront. Banfield's first career as an “information specialist” in the United States Department of Agriculture

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had brought to his attention failed efforts at “economic development” at home—e.g., rural farm collectives in Arizona—as well as abroad. He studied similar efforts in Kansas, but chose not to write about them. Impressed by certain aspects of Mormon theology, Banfield, with family in tow, went to Utah and carried out a study analogous to that of *Moral Basis*; yet he chose not to publish the resulting manuscript. (In passing, it was remarked that though Banfield’s own reluctance may have been unfortunate many scholars would do well to follow his example in this regard.) So, to use the language of modern social science, *Moral Basis* was not as much an outlier as might appear at a glance.

Moral Basis, it was suggested, is best understood not as a departure from Banfield’s characteristic concerns but as a complement to them. The book has two epigraphs, one from Hobbes, the other Tocqueville:

In such condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving, and removing, such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

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In democratic countries the science of association is the mother of science; the progress of all the rest depends upon the progress it has made.

Tocqueville highlights the necessary connection between the science of association and democratic progress. Banfield, as it were, applied Tocqueville's insight to a society within hailing distance of Hobbes's state of nature, seeking the sources of Southern Italy's resistance to modern progress.

Banfield found these sources in the phenomenon he called "amoral familism," the deep distrust of anyone outside the bounds of the nuclear family, which distrust prevented Montegrano's residents from cooperating with one another. Although that term may sound like something one expects to find in conventional social science, Banfield's analysis was anything but conventional. Most immediately, Banfield's work was a challenge to then-influential Marxist analyses of social and economic development, as well as to the modernization theories of mainstream international development economics. Social life, he observed, was far too complex to be reduced to the mere by-product of competing economic forces and interests. Amoral familism was a *cultural* pattern, though one influenced by land-holding practices, low life-expectancy, and other material factors. *Moral Basis* thus anticipated Banfield's later writings contrasting *homo economicus* and *homo politicus* as well as today's concern with what is called "social capital."

In this light, it was suggested that Banfield's work was a sort of Aristotelian social science. Yet a few participants argued that although Banfield's political science in *Moral Basis* was far richer than contemporary social science, it was

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not Aristotelian. Banfield did not share Aristotle's respect for the importance of political opinion. He did not seem to understand Montegranean political life in light of the political opinions expressed by its citizens. Instead, he tended to view those opinions, and that political life, as the product of what its people were prior to it. There were powerful forces behind the "is" of any society, according to Banfield, and his characteristic question was not "how do we change this" but "how do we understand this." Whereas Marxists and progressives focused exclusively on economics, Banfield focused on larger social or cultural forces as they acted upon what he argued was a genuine human nature. As suggested by the book's other epigraph concerning the character of life in the "state of nature," at this point in his career Banfield's understanding of man's nature was powerfully informed by Hobbes. Still, fear had not moved the Montegraneans into a secure and prosperous civil society, as Hobbes's theory might have predicted. Banfield sought the cause of this failure mainly in culture rather than in an analysis of human nature, and in familial rather than individual terms; and on these points he seemed to part company with Hobbes.

This was not the only respect in which several participants discerned "modern" elements in Banfield's thought. *Moral Basis* depreciates to a remarkable extent the role that religion plays in the Montegranean moral world. For all his criticisms of modern rationalism, it was suggested at session's end, Banfield was at bottom a kind of modern rationalist.

SESSION 2

THE MORAL BASIS OF AN ADVANCED SOCIETY

Readings: *The Unheavenly City Revisited* (1974), pp. 52-76 (and notes, pp. 302-308).

“Art and the Public Interest” (1986), reprinted in *Here the People Rule*, 2nd edition (1991), pp. 361-372.

The second session was devoted to discussion of Banfield’s most famous work, *The Unheavenly City*, and in particular of its controversial thesis concerning social class and “time horizons.” Banfield set forth a kind of class-based analysis of the American city. He suggested that social classes should be distinguished not so much by income (which he saw more as an effect than a cause) but by their ethos or characteristic approach to life. Generally speaking, Banfield argued that individuals in the lower class had short time horizons. They were what he called “present oriented,” i.e., unwilling or unable to plan for the future—concerned with immediate “action” and gratification. In contrast, middle-class individuals, as a rule, possessed longer time horizons; they recognized the need to subordinate their immediate impulses so as to be capable of long-term security and advancement. The working class fell somewhere between these two groups. And the most “future-oriented” of all was the upper class, whose ethos of public spiritedness

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often edged over into moral self-righteousness, do-goodery, and high-toned self-indulgence.

Is the Banfield of *The Unheavenly City* the same social scientist he was in *Moral Basis*? Participants remarked a number of characteristic similarities as well as some important differences. In both works one finds the same quasi-Hobbesian view of human selfishness. Yet there is this difference: whereas the selfishness discerned in *Moral Basis* was connected to the family, the model propounded in *The Unheavenly City* was more individualistic. The latter work shifts the emphasis from cultural breakdown towards personal incapacity as the root of the modern American city's most vexing problems.

Whatever these differences may suggest about Banfield's thinking, it was argued that they should not obscure the presence of a practical judgment or intent that is characteristically Banfieldian. Both books were intended to chasten would-be reformers. *The Unheavenly City's* emphasis on the individual suggests the need for a politics of individual responsibility. Banfield's chief target therein was the nostrum that all social problems are susceptible to governmental solution. So it may have been the case that a difference in circumstances, as opposed to a difference in thought, underlay the two works' seemingly discordant diagnoses.

A disagreement arose in regard to the usefulness of the concept of time horizons. A few participants suggested that while the claim concerning time horizons is true as far as it goes, it does not go very far. It abstracts from too much—e.g., regional differences, religious affiliations, church or

Colloquium

synagogue attendance—and too much partakes of the language of modern “value-neutral” social science. Against these arguments, several participants interjected that in order to get any type of hearing in the academy, Banfield needed to address his contemporaries in their own language. Besides, the urgent problem of crime demanded that present-orientedness be exposed in order to undercut the fashionable thinking that the root causes of crime are unemployment, social prejudice, and so forth. A discussant noted that recent research had uncovered a neurological basis for short time horizons, suggesting that genetic predisposition may play a larger role than Banfield realized.

As in the first, participants in this session found it useful to appeal to Tocqueville in order to get a handle on Banfield’s own understanding of American politics. On the one hand, his description of the future-orientedness of middle and upper-class Americans could be seen as the ultimate vindication of Tocqueville’s doctrine of self-interest properly understood: theirs was a self-interest extremely well-understood. The lower and working classes struggled along with a very imperfectly understood notion of enlightened self-interest. On the other hand, it was suggested that there was something most un-Tocquevillian about a class-analysis of American politics, even if the classes are based not on income but on mores. In this regard, it was noted that, again unlike Tocqueville, Banfield puts little weight on religion and the role of equality in American life. In fact, it was pointed out that in the session’s other assigned reading, his short essay, “Art and the Public Interest,” he goes so far as to omit the assertion of human equality from

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his summary of the Declaration of Independence. The “ringing words” of Banfield’s Declaration read: “All men are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights....”

In his defense, several participants noted that time horizons did not explain all class characteristics, as Banfield himself shows. Particularly for the upper-class, opinions or ideology explain much more of the ethos than do time horizons, which seem to be more useful in exploring lower, working, and middle-class culture. In addition, upper-class opinion sets the limits of what is “acceptable” for the whole society. One participant pointed out that Banfield was aware that “the shape of time” could sometimes be more important than its “linearity.” For the Montegrans, Banfield wrote, marriage and death were the highlights of life.

The Unheavenly City was, another participant said, the most practical of Banfield’s books. It began life as a series of newspaper articles addressing the practical questions of the modern American city, particularly what if anything could be done about the disorderly poor. Banfield’s sharp observations of lower-class culture rang true, but “going up the class scale” in order to make these observations more “theoretical” may have been inopportune. Nevertheless, his descriptions of class culture always shows a discerning eye and a felicitous pen.

SESSION 3

THE PROBLEMS OF THE CITY

Readings: *City Politics*, co-authored with James Q. Wilson (1963), pp. 1-4, 18-32.
The Unheavenly City Revisited (1974), pp. 234-240, 260-278 (and notes, pp. 346-348, 354-357).

The third session began with some unfinished business from the second—further discussion of “Art and the Public Interest,” an essay that contains one of Banfield’s most interesting discussions of the fundamental principles of the American regime and, in fact, the meaning of the common good as such.

In this essay, his characteristic approach is, as it were, turned on its head. Typically, Banfield addressed salient issues of public policy without explicitly raising questions of the fundamental principles of politics. It might be more precise to say, volunteered a participant, that for eminently Burkean reasons Banfield discussed the chief public issues of the day in a way that was meant to discourage raising the ultimate questions. To treat already divisive issues in philosophical terms was apt to inflame passions in ways that could be very unhealthy; better to leave them under a “politic, well-wrought veil,” in Burke’s phrase. The suggestion was made that by so raising such questions in regard to a tangential issue like public funding of the arts, Banfield meant to give an object lesson concerning when

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and how questions of fundamental principles should *voluntarily* be raised in political life.

Banfield argued that Americans, from the Founding onwards, had never entirely made up their minds on the two “great and more or less conflicting” purposes of government—protecting the individual in “the exercise of his rights” and improving him “as a citizen.” Both elements are found in the American political tradition. What Americans *had* agreed on was that government should serve “public interests.” Several participants suggested that Banfield had preserved the ambivalent character of American government in his subsequent distinction between two views of “the common benefit.” On the one hand, the “welfare conception” of “the greatest good of the greatest number” represented the Lockean view of Americans as fundamentally private individuals or “consumers.” On the other hand, the idea of “the public interest” represented Americans as “citizens,” as members of a public bound together by common conceptions of right and justice.

Not surprisingly, the discussion concerning arts and the public good was among the most contentious at the conference, rivaled only by the later consideration of Banfield’s writings on the American Founding. To say the least, no consensus emerged as to what genuinely underlay Banfield’s concern with this topic. The following suggestions, among others, were made: 1) Banfield was not truly concerned with the question of art, but saw it as a convenient vehicle by which to raise questions concerning the legitimacy of Big Government. 2) Banfield was truly concerned with art, and somehow his sensibilities were

Colloquium

particularly offended by the governmental subsidy of “art” that he considered unworthy of the name. 3) Given the obvious connection of art to problems of education and character formation, Banfield believed the question of public support of the arts was a singularly promising one by which to explore the tension between the American regime’s classical elements and its modern ones. 4) Banfield fastened on art because it afforded him the opportunity to indulge his own democratic sensibilities at the expense of a decadent elite. The hypothesis showcased “Ed the radical egalitarian,” as one wit expressed it, making however a serious point.

Suspicious as his writings are of do-gooders and reformers who speak in the name of the public interest or the common good, no one can read those writings without becoming aware of Banfield’s own unboastful public-spiritedness. Is there then no place in Banfield’s world for the political equivalent of his own scholarly activity? Can one ultimately square his sense of the political—and his defense of the political against both goo-goo planners and libertarian economists—with his skepticism in regard to justice and its knowability? One participant remarked that Banfield’s account of lower-class crimes, for example, regarded them principally as failures of self-control (time horizons) rather than acts of injustice. Did this do justice to their full political implications?

This question was sharpened. In *City Politics*, Banfield and James Q. Wilson set forth two “principal functions” of government, that of providing necessary “services” that cannot be supplied privately (e.g., police) and that of “conflict management.” The Daley machine that Banfield

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examined repeatedly and not unsympathetically provided the most striking embodiment of a healthy politics of “conflict management,” declared one participant. Although Banfield described the *conditions* for securing Daley’s freedom to pursue “the common good,” Banfield seemed reluctant to describe that common good. Indeed, another participant said, the underlying presupposition of politics understood as conflict management is that there is no such thing as the common good, or at least there is no such thing as a common good that people will agree on. The best one can do is muddle through.

No doubt part of the reason for Banfield’s unfashionable openness to Daley was the Mayor’s singular freedom from hypocritical moralizing. To Banfield, such moralizing went profoundly against the grain. Part of his genius was his uncanny ability to identify and to expose that way of thinking and acting for what it is. Yet it was suggested that his aversion to such cant was perhaps too strong; one at times gets the impression that he is constitutionally averse to any claims on behalf of the public good. Other participants, however, pointed to Banfield’s own words in “Art and the Public Interest”: “I believe that the principle concern of government ought to be with the public interest...[T]he principle, the overriding task of government is with matters that concern ‘citizens.’” Thus his famous, if still somewhat ambivalent, example: “I suggest that a court house is justified in a way that a statue in front of it is not.”

SESSION 4

POLITICS, ECONOMICS, AND THE LIMITS OF REASON

Readings: “Ends and Means in Planning” (1959), reprinted in *Here the People Rule*, 2nd ed., pp. 209-219.
“Are Homo Economicus and Homo Politicus Kin?” (1964), *ibid.*, pp. 384-395.
“Corruption as a Feature of Governmental Organization” (1975), *ibid.*, pp. 185-207.

The fourth session focused to a considerable extent on Banfield’s understanding of his own role as a social scientist. To understand Banfield properly, it was contended, one must pay attention to the intellectual and political situation in which he wrote. One participant explained that it was misleading to try to treat Banfield as a political theorist; he was much more of an anti-Marxist than a theorist in his own right. Concepts such as “amoral familism” and “time horizons” had to be seen in that light in order to be judged fairly. Banfield often tailored what he wrote to his fellow political scientists. After all, he faced a political or social science dominated by the fact-value distinction. As such, this social science was constitutionally hostile to the sorts of moral judgments that Banfield thought it necessary to make in studying political phenomena. To gain a hearing for himself in the academy, he spoke to his fellow social scientists in their own language. He “rendered strong moral judgments in the guise of social science.” In these respects,

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Banfield was very influenced by Leo Strauss, his associate at Chicago in the 1950s.

Yet Banfield's real target was not so much Marxism as the New Deal, suggested another participant. Banfield was heavily influenced by his early experience in the Department of Agriculture, where he learned first-hand that even the best-intentioned government efforts at planning and reform are far more likely to do harm than good. More often and more intelligently than any other political scientist of our time, Banfield brought to life the unintended consequences of would-be reforms.

Since Banfield was suspicious of unqualified adulation—even in his own case—it was necessary to ask next what were the limits of Banfield's teaching concerning limits? To a certain extent, these may have been self-imposed. Banfield's writings were addressed to a very restricted audience, several discussants noted. He was concerned with "elite" opinion; he made little or no effort to influence public opinion. Yet his failure to seek a popular audience was not simply an accident of his character; in his political science, there seems to be little or no room for the self-conscious shaping of mass or public opinion, i.e., what Lincoln identified as the essence of democratic statesmanship. Other participants objected, however, that Ed's early experience as a journalist had lasting effects. As a Harvard professor, he wrote occasionally for newspapers, and his prose was always lucid and direct. Furthermore, *The Unheavenly City* and *The Unheavenly City Revisited* were among the biggest-selling books ever written by an American political scientist.

Colloquium

Towards the end of the session, the discussion shifted from Banfield's uneasy relation to his fellow political scientists to his appreciation of how much—and how little—the economic way of thinking could explain about man's, or at least contemporary man's, behavior. Banfield thought that in certain arenas economics could shed some light on politics, particularly on questions of regulation and administration. His willingness to test and to integrate such insights into his political science was characteristic of him. He was never wedded to one approach, many participants declared. He employed whatever tools were at hand.

Yet he was by no means an uncritical admirer of the economic approach to man. He objected to its imperial aspirations. Economic man is not political man. Political motivations are far more complicated than economics will allow. The attempt to apply economic assumptions to political matters ignores the specific character of the political. Whereas markets work best when they are "efficient," politics in the United States is designed to be inefficient, and with good reason. The political plan or design that Banfield admired the most was the United States Constitution: unlike most efforts at political reform, which as a rule call forth further reforms, the Founders employed innovation to render difficult further innovation.

SESSION 5

POLITICIANS AND STATESMEN

Readings: “The Training of the Executive” (1960), reprinted in *Here the People Rule*, 2nd ed., pp. 220-246.
“The Dangerous Goodness of Democracy” (1963), *ibid.*, pp. 341-344.
“Was the Founding an Accident?” (1987), *ibid.*, pp. 7-22.

The fifth session featured a long discussion of the problem of corruption. What is corruption? More precisely, what forms does corruption take in the political world? Can some of these be salutary?

To begin, a distinction was drawn between “money corruption” and “policy corruption.” “Money corruption” is the old-fashioned exchange of a bribe for a service or favor from a government official. “Policy corruption” consists in the hijacking of public policy through legal means, for the benefit of a private few or a narrow interest group. Banfield was far more troubled by the latter than the former. The former was sometimes useful in a politics of “conflict management,” where material incentives would often induce self-interested persons to act for the general good. Moreover, where a political ethic prevailed that was somewhat tolerant of money corruption, e.g., in Daley’s Chicago, one was less likely to find the peremptory political moralism that Banfield warned against time and again.

Colloquium

Using common sense as well as rational-choice economics, he contrasted corruption as a feature of economic and governmental organization. In corporations, there existed incentives to optimize the level of corruption; in government, policies attempted instead to eliminate it. In a lively, wide-ranging discussion, the colloquium drew comparisons between these varieties of dishonesty and policy or “official” corruption—e.g., the “capture” of a regulatory agency by a special interest. Such indirect corruption is particularly disturbing because it is often not regarded as corruption; it goes hand-in-hand with the growth of the administrative state; and it is peculiarly unpolitical. In an upper-middle-class society, policy corruption tends to increase and money corruption tends to decrease. In such societies, new goods are constantly created or made widely available that are subject to government regulation and hence are eligible for side payments. One participant demurred that the “new corruption” is, properly speaking, not corruption at all because it lacks a *mens rea*, an evil intent.

Yet surely it is possible, another countered, to speak of the “abuse” of regulatory power, even if regulatory agencies have been given only the vaguest standards of “public interest” by which to govern themselves. In the old corruption, a third offered, it was the person accepting the bribe who felt the corruption more; in the new corruption, it is the one giving the bribe who feels it more.

Many potential examples of policy corruption were discussed, including land use planning and regulatory commissions; class action lawsuits (in which the trial lawyers’ fees verge on old-style corruption, someone declared);

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affirmative-action policies; and excessive compensation for corporate executives. One discussant remarked the “fictive quality” to the interests allegedly advanced, for example, in class-action suits and affirmative-action litigation. Several deplored the lack of political accountability that resulted.

Banfield was never one to heap disdain on politics. In this regard, a participant highlighted Banfield’s striking comments in “The Dangerous Goodness of Democracy,” vindicating the “virtue” of the statesmen against the “goodness” of the people. “Much as we may wish it, the world cannot be ruled according to the Sermon on the Mount or the principles of the Quakers, and a determined effort to rule it so may lead to disaster,” wrote Banfield.

This selection contains one of Banfield’s few citations of Leo Strauss, and it raised again the question of Banfield’s relation to Strauss. Banfield thought Strauss the most remarkable man he had ever met, reported one participant. Banfield had learned from Strauss about the dignity of the political, said another. Strauss had shown that philosophy, properly understood, was political philosophy; Banfield’s writings showed that social science, properly practiced, was political science. Yet for all his appreciation of Strauss, Banfield was not a “Straussian.” Strauss and Banfield, it was said, ultimately differed on the status of reason. Much like the Burke that Strauss portrays in *Natural Right and History*, Banfield’s critique of modern rationalism tended to edge over into a critique of reason itself.

One thing Banfield may have learned from Strauss was the political importance of foundings and founding principles. Especially in his later writings, Banfield turned to

Colloquium

the study of the American founding and to an inchoate distinction between politicians and statesmen, noticed several at the table. Yet he did so in a characteristically skeptical way. As suggested by the title of his essay “Was the Founding an Accident?” Banfield resisted the temptation to celebrate even the American Founders’ achievement as a triumph of pure statesmanship untouched by accidents or interests. As a participant explained, Banfield once defined politicians as “persons skilled at patching up compromises among opposed interests,” as opposed to statesmen, “persons who hold to a comprehensive and internally consistent view of the common good.” The speaker remarked that an ambiguity remained: a politician was not a statesman, but Banfield seemed to leave room for a statesman to be a politician, or at least to be a sometime practitioner of the politician’s art.

SESSION 6

REFORM AND THE AMERICAN POLITICAL ORDER

Readings: *Political Influence* (1961), pp. 258-262.

“In Defense of the American Party System” (1961), reprinted in *Here the People Rule*, 2nd ed., pp. 54-71.

“Party ‘Reform’ in Retrospect” (1980), *ibid.*, pp. 72-86.

The final session picked up where the preceding one had ended, with “Was the Founding an Accident?” Banfield’s title question took its cue from Hamilton’s remark in the first *Federalist* paper that it may be up to the people of America to show that societies of men can establish good government by “reflection and choice” as opposed to “accident and force.” Banfield’s answer to his own title question was a qualified “Yes.” His essay sets forth an impressive array of historical accidents waiting to happen—any one of which could have derailed the Constitution—that did not happen.

A number of participants, more impressed by Banfield’s “yes” than by its qualifications, thought he did not do justice to those elements of “reflection and choice” that held sway at the Convention. Banfield’s argument on the decisive role of chance was stronger in regard to the Constitution’s ratification than it was regarding the Constitutional Convention itself, a participant suggested. Was Banfield

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really claiming that there was no reflection and choice at the Convention? wondered another. Or merely that the Constitution as written did not resemble any *individual's* predilections and was, therefore, in a sense unintentional or “accidental”? Granted, the Constitution was the product of compromises and deliberation. Yet informing those compromises, many participants observed, was the judgment of thoughtful statesmen.

It was suggested that to understand why Banfield argued that the Founding *may* have been an accident, one should consider “In Defense of the American Party System.” In this essay he argued that the American party system deserves our reverence in part because it was an accident. So happy an accident is indistinguishable from a gift of Providence—a suggestion that Banfield raised in both essays and emphasized in the one devoted to the party system, several participants noted. Perhaps it is because the American founding can supply its own (divine?) justification that Banfield invites us to question it.

“In Defense of the American Party System” is one of Banfield’s most forthrightly “conservative” essays. It argues that as the fortunate heirs of a party system that acts to dampen potentially divisive and destructive political passions, we should count our blessings. It also predicts that we will not do so; that we will not let well enough alone. The discussion turned to the comparison of this essay with his reconsideration, “Party Reforms in Retrospect,” written almost twenty years later. What his first essay on the party system did not predict was that the parties would *intentionally* transform themselves, argued one discussant. In the years

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following that essay, both parties become more forthrightly ideological. They “reformed” themselves from within, the Democrats moving from Daley to George McGovern, the Republicans following suit, substituting primaries for caucuses and open, ideological contests for decisions by party insiders. A number of participants were struck by the second essay’s Tocquevillian quality: in seeking to explain the events of the intervening years, Banfield drew the dispiriting conclusion that the excesses of reform had to be traced to the character of democracy itself.

Accused or accusing themselves of being insufficiently “democratic,” American political parties rushed to redeem themselves, without reflecting on the wisdom or the unanticipated consequences of such transformations. Banfield saw these reforms as epitomizing the way in which democracy, when it tries to plan for itself, threatens instead to undermine itself. Yet at session’s end it was noted that the essay concludes by invoking the American founders’ wisdom and their enduring principles. Banfield taught us that we had resources at our disposal with which to counter our own unhealthy tendencies.

Such a resource was Banfield’s own political science, open to moral and political principles but always insisting that no principles could replace the mysterious faculty of political judgment.



A CONNECTICUT YANKEE IN KING ARTHUR'S COURT¹: A BIOGRAPHY

By James Q. Wilson

Those of us who were privileged to know Edward Banfield can only with some difficulty convey to others his true greatness. If you neither knew nor read him, he is unknown to you, for he had no interest in fame or publicity. On one occasion, the publishers of *Who's Who* announced that he would be included in their next edition. He wrote back to say that he did not want to be included; if they printed a sketch of him despite his objections, he would sue them. And had he thought that his writings would bring him fame, he would have modified—that is, corrupted—his judgment by molding his bold arguments to fit the temper of the times, and so he never would have suggested that political machines are useful, that most urban problems are spurious and the few that exist cannot be solved by any popular remedy, and that art museums should display perfect

¹ I am grateful to many people for help in producing this essay. Two of the most important are Laura Banfield, Ed's wife, and Stephen Smith, now the editor of *U.S. News and World Report*, who, when a reporter for the *Boston Globe* in 1977, interviewed Ed, his family, and his friends at length and recorded the interviews on tape. He had been commissioned to write a profile of Ed for *Esquire* magazine, but the piece was never published. Smith has generously allowed me to quote from the tapes. All direct quotations that do not draw from published materials are from the Smith interviews.

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copies of their paintings and sell the originals to people foolish enough to think they can tell the difference.

If you read these books but did not know the author, you might well be intrigued, but since you would be surrounded by people who believe that the opposite of these arguments are true, you would be left alone to defend heresy against orthodoxy, no easy task. But if you knew Ed you would have understood first-hand how a great intellect produced coherent arguments that stand so powerfully against much of elite opinion. You would have understood, in short, why a man of common origins and an uncommon mind would test the conventional opinion of intellectual elites against the practical needs of ordinary people.

But in time much of what Ed wrote was accepted by bright people as, slowly and unevenly, they were mugged by reality. In 1955 he and Martin Meyerson published a book about how Chicago built public housing projects. In it they explained that these tall, grim buildings, sited only in areas that guaranteed racial segregation, were a serious mistake. At the time this was a powerful dissent from the view that housing projects must be built and that alternatives—such as supply vouchers to those who needed financial help in renting housing—were unthinkable. Today vouchers are in and some housing projects are being dynamited to remove these eyesores from the city.

In 1958, Ed, with the assistance of his wife, Laura, explained why an area in southern Italy was poor. The reason, they said, was not government neglect or poor education, but culture. In their book, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, they showed that people would not

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cooperate outside of the their own families. This kind of “amoral familism,” as they called it, was the result of a high death rate, a defective system of owning land, and the absence of extended families. By contrast, in an equally forbidding part of Southern Utah the residents were engaged in a variety of associations, each busily involved in improving the life of the community. In southern Italy, people did not cooperate; in southern Utah, they scarcely did anything else.

Foreign aid programs, Ed later wrote, ignored these profound cultural realities and instead went about persuading other nations to accept large grants to build new physical projects. Few of these projects led to sustained economic growth; indeed, many became a source of money stolen by local political elites. As P. T. Bauer was later to put it, foreign aid was a program whereby poor people in rich countries had their money sent to rich people in poor countries. Where rapid economic growth did occur, as in Hong Kong, Singapore, and South Korea, foreign aid, to the extent it existed at all, made little difference. Today, scholars now recognize the great importance of culture in explaining why some areas are poor and others prosperous. Only a few of them, however, even refer to Ed’s book. One recent exception is *Culture Matters*, edited by Samuel P. Huntington and Lawrence Harrison. It was dedicated to Ed.

In 1970, he published his most famous book, *The Unheavenly City*, in which he argued that the “urban crisis” was misunderstood. Many aspects of the so-called crisis, such as the public’s flight to the suburbs, are not really problems at all, but instead a great improvement in human

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lives. Some things that are problems, such as traffic congestion, could be managed rather well by putting high peak-hour tolls on key roads and staggering working hours. And those things that are great problems, such as crime, poverty, and racial injustice, exist because we do not know how to end them.

Take the problem of poor African Americans. Racism, though much diminished in recent years, still exists and has a significant effect. But the central problem for many black Americans is not racism but poverty, and a large part (though far from all) of that poverty arises from people, both white and black but disproportionately among the latter, who have a lower-class culture. By this he meant one that reflects a short time-horizon such that life consists in living from moment to moment. To the extent such people think about the future, it is, they feel, largely shaped by fate, not by their own activities. They are interested in present action, and among males, in risk-taking, fighting, and respect. The last quality is especially important to people who have trouble making friends and who resent any sign of authority. A lower-class culture often arises in a female-headed household where women have a series of lovers, none of whom takes much responsibility for raising the children that result from casual encounters. This is a problem for all lower-class people, white or black, but for blacks it acquires a special edge because “much of what appears...as race prejudice is really class prejudice.”

Ed predicted that this book “will probably strike many readers as the work of an ill-tempered and mean-spirited fellow,” and he was absolutely right. Academic denunciations

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hurled down on him; he was called, among other things, a reactionary racist. Within twenty years, however, books were appearing that, without mentioning Banfield, wrote about how social class had shaped inner-city life for African Americans. In 1987, William Julius Wilson wrote in his widely acclaimed book, *The Truly Disadvantaged*, that though racism exists, social class explains the plight of many blacks. To Wilson, an “underclass” exists because of the absence of jobs; Ed would have agreed, up to a point. But he would have argued that beyond a lack of inner-city jobs there is also a culture that arises independently of jobs.

In 1990, Elijah Anderson, a black professor of sociology, published a book that completed Ed’s analysis. In *Street Wise*, he wrote of the life of African American adolescent boys in a poor neighborhood in which they lack any sense of the future, regard sex as an opportunity for conquest rather than an aspect of marriage, and chiefly value respect within their peer groups. The result is a growing number of unwed parents who raise children in what Anderson calls unprotected nests. The book was widely praised, often by the same people who had denounced Ed’s book twenty years earlier.

Ed’s life is an example of that old saying about a prophet without honor in his own country—or at least in his own times. He saw the world as a boy raised on a Connecticut farm who later found himself plunked down in a scholarly Camelot, Harvard University. There he met the intellectual Knights of the Roundtable and through them their allies in many other high places. But Ed, like the “practical Connecticut farmer” whom Mark Twain portrayed in his

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famous novel, used his native skill to defeat Merlin and other mental magicians.

* * *

Edward Christie Banfield was born on November 19, 1916, in Bloomfield, Connecticut. He later remarked that his father was a farmer “by temperament and taste” while his mother “adored the city,” and so they compromised: he worked in a Hartford factory but they spent much of their time on a small farm in Bloomfield. Ed’s wife later put it a bit differently: His mother enjoyed summers on the farm but liked the cultural and educational opportunities of the city. But living in both places convinced Ed that he was marginal to these worlds and so, like many marginal writers, he understood each better because of the somewhat distant perspective he had been given. He wrote perceptively about the city and rural life and lived in each world: in the cities of Chicago, Cambridge, and Philadelphia, but with long visits to Utah and southern Italy and summers on the Vermont farm that he and his wife tended with great skill and affection.

His family was Unitarian, but Ed never thought of himself as having any religious beliefs. He later described Unitarians as having a church that “believes in one God, at most.” But like many non-believers, Ed thought it important for society, created and sustained by custom and belief, to think of some things as sacred. Just how one might reconcile personal skepticism and social reverence was never clear to him. On another occasion, many years later, he said to me

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after having spent weeks reading some important Biblical works that religion might be a good idea if its leaders did not write such nonsense.

He went to Connecticut State College where he intended to study animal husbandry, but after a short exposure to books about cows and pigs he announced to his roommate that he was sick of livestock. The roommate sternly replied that if Ed was going to speak critically about animals he would invite him to step outside for a fight. The fight was avoided and Ed became an English major. He was a gifted writer and soon become editor of the college newspaper.

In college he met Laura Fasano, who was one year ahead of him. She was raised in New Haven where her father was a musician. She had four older siblings. Two of them, as well as her parents, were born in Italy. Laura, along with one brother, were born in the United States. (She had another brother who died in infancy.) Her mother was not a Catholic, and religion played no role in her childhood. At college she studied science and met this “tall, lanky guy.” In September, 1938, they were married after a hurricane caused the Connecticut River to overflow, leaving Ed and Laura on opposite shores. Finally Ed got to New Haven and they were married at 4 PM in Laura’s home. Their parents got along well even though Laura’s mother did not speak English.

Laura is a remarkable woman. Though afflicted by a number of accidents, she bounced back from each with scarcely a complaint. By contemporary standards their marriage was quite traditional, with him earning a living and her running the home and raising the children, an arrangement that never bothered either. Ed later described

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Laura as being quite bright but in a different way than he. His mind worked logically, trying to solve puzzles; her mind worked intuitively, entering imaginatively into the minds of other people. And coupled with her intuitive intelligence was extraordinary patience, a good quality to have when in Ed's company. He had a short fuse, but Laura knew that his bursts of exasperation were always short-lived.

On graduation, they found themselves in the midst of the Great Depression with jobs, especially for writers, few and far between. The search for decent employment led them to move repeatedly. At first, Laura worked in the animal disease laboratory that was part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture while Ed took a job selling advertising at the Rockville, Connecticut, newspaper. (A college professor, when told by Ed that he had found a job, said he was delighted because many firms would not hire a Jew. The professor had wondered whether Ed was Jewish, but decided he was when he married a Jewish woman. In fact, neither Ed nor Laura was Jewish.) In 1939 he worked for the New Hampshire Farm Bureau Federation; this meant moving to Concord, New Hampshire. The following year he took a better offer as a public-relations man for the Farm Security Administration (FSA), an important New Deal agency, but this meant moving again, this time to Upper Darby, Pennsylvania. Two years later, with the same job, they moved to Indianapolis, and a few months after landing there they went on to Washington, D.C. It was in this agency, Ed later remarked, that he began to learn about bureaucracy.

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Their daughter, Laura, was born on August 22, 1943, in Washington. With this three-month-old baby, they had to relocate again as the FSA assigned Ed to its San Francisco office. Once again they got in the car and moved. On the way, Ed registered for the draft and was declared 4F owing to physical limitations, limitations that subsequent diseases only increased. Two years after arriving in California, their son, Elliott, was born on April 23, 1945.

In the FSA, Ed helped produce information about much of the agency's western region. It was in this capacity that he first made contact with members of the Mormon church, a group in which he took a lifelong interest. Years later he wrote a book manuscript about the Mormon families living in Gunlock, Utah, but it was never published and, for reasons to be discussed later, never will be.

Throughout his life, Ed was afflicted by serious diseases. As a boy he had rheumatic fever and so was not taken into the Army. In San Francisco in 1945 he was struck by mitral endocarditis and was only saved because penicillin had just been discovered. In Paris he contracted acute transverse myelitis, a disease akin to polio. Ed later remarked that had they only called it polio he would have been eligible for money from the March of Dimes. On each occasion, Laura, who had been trained as a microbiologist, worried that Ed might die. Though indeed a tall, lanky fellow, his illnesses left him bent over as he walked about. One journalist who later observed him at Harvard wrote that he walked across Harvard Yard like a farmer intent on planting corn there. While at the University of Pennsylvania in 1975 he developed cataracts in both eyes. In those days laser therapy

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had just been introduced and his doctor advised against the new procedure, and so his corneas were removed surgically, leaving him blind for many weeks. As he began to recover, I one day brought him a copy of *Playboy* thinking that it might brighten his spirits. I guessed wrong, not because he disliked attractive women (we spent a good deal of time discussing them), but because he felt that the magazine was trash. Which it was.

Ed gradually became disenchanted with the FSA. He was later to say that its policies often hurt the very people—tenant farmers—that it was trying to help. He was thinking of quitting the agency, but he had no other job available to him. That job, however, was to materialize out of happy circumstances. It seems that FSA was planning to destroy some old files, and one of Ed's acquaintances, Paul S. Taylor, a professor of economics at the University of California at Berkeley, expressed an interest in what they said. Ed agreed to write for Taylor a memo about the files. Taylor saw to it that this memo came to the attention of Rexford Guy Tugwell, an important member of Franklin Roosevelt's "brain trust." Tugwell was impressed with Ed's intelligence and knowledge and invited him to come to the University of Chicago where Tugwell was going to head a new program in planning. Ed protested; he had no PhD., or any graduate training at all, and should he go to Chicago the first job he would be able to get there would pay about one-half of what he was earning in the FSA. Moreover, he and Laura now had two children to support.

But he and Laura decided to take the chance and went to the Midwest. She later remarked that the change was never

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an issue; “things would work out,” she remarked on this and every other occasion when the couple faced a choice. They were helped in this move by financial aid from Sam Hamburg, a wealthy California farmer who had studied a while at Berkeley and met Ed through Professor Taylor.

On arriving at the university, Ed became a graduate student in political science at what was a remarkably fine and intellectually exciting school. That excitement had several sources. Chicago began as a graduate school and took graduate instruction very seriously; it was located in a blighted community such that most faculty lived within easy walking distance of the campus, thereby allowing community contacts to reinforce university ones; it was intellectually diverse, with people from the Left and Right present in large numbers and working peacefully together; and as Milton Friedman later remarked, it was a thousand miles from Washington, D.C., and thus free from many of the distractions of national politics.

Ed was especially drawn to the classes taught by Herbert Blumer, a sociologist, who introduced him to the writings of William Graham Sumner and George Herbert Mead. He learned about the sociology of knowledge from classes with Louis Wirth. An important influence on him was that of the social theorist, Edward A. Shils, with whom he collaborated in writing some conceptual models about such topics as authority and influence. He began to acquire in these studies a larger view of how society worked and human personalities were formed. Though he took no courses from Frank Knight (he was a terrible teacher), the latter’s writings, especially those on the role of risk, uncertainty, and

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entrepreneurship, were very important to Ed, as were courses offered by the agricultural economist, Theodore W. Schultz. Later on he would remark that many of his best ideas were derived from Knight. Though the Chicago economics department was a center of free-market thinking, Ed was not drawn into it. He did not get to know Milton Friedman well until after Ed had moved to Harvard and acquired a farm not far from Friedman's summer home. In New England, but not in Chicago, the two men spent a lot of time together.

Two young Chicago scholars, the economist Julius Margolis, and the city planner Martin Meyerson, became close friends and in their company he became interested in the theory of planning. Ed focused on the theoretical basis of planning, the very enterprise in which the FSA was involved, by a close reading of many philosophical texts and examining the arguments about rationality offered by Herbert Simon and Chester Barnard. This thinking led to a profound change in his outlook, one that helped him understand that his unease with the FSA reflected not merely a job misfit but an intellectual rebellion, a revolt greatly stimulated by being in a university where, as Laura later put it, "the intellectual life made him come alive."

But that change took a few years to run its course. Though Ed was an increasingly disillusioned New Dealer, he was not yet a defector. In 1952 he voted for Adlai Stevenson for president and during the late 1940s and early 1950s he published papers, some written jointly with Tugwell, in which he defended the planner's view that governmental

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affairs would be better managed if decisions were made rationally.

Unlike graduate students today, Ed believed that when you wrote a seminar paper for a course it ought to be good enough to be published. Many of his were, and so we have a coherent view of his thought while he was a student and young university teacher in his early thirties. These writings were of two sorts: empirical and rather critical accounts of government programs he knew from the inside, and conceptual and rather idealistic papers about how he thought government ought to function. The critical accounts and the conceptual proposals were, for a few years, not really brought together. Ed was changing, but like most important intellectual changes his did not happen in a blinding flash of new-found insight but rather in a slow working out of difficult puzzles. And these puzzles had to be worked out in a world many intellectuals doubted would ever exist. The nation entered the Second World War from the depths of the Depression, and many serious thinkers believed that when the heavy government expenditures of the war ended the nation would collapse back into an economic recession. Key people in the federal government were trying to prepare for this by seeking to strengthen federal agencies, such as the National Resources Planning Board, that might engage in economic planning. Outside the government, many economists were predicting the worst and political radicals were looking forward to a chance to renew their demands for fundamental social change. But when the soldiers and sailors came home, prosperity erupted as accumulated earnings were spent on new homes and cars. The migration

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from farms to cities, already underway before and during the depression, now became even more pronounced.

Ed saw this change in an essay he published evaluating Washington's efforts to help tenant farmers.² During its ten-year effort, the FSA had managed to make loans to only about 2 percent of all the tenants; at this rate, it would take 400 years for the program to reach all of them. To make matters worse, Congress had imposed limits on how big a farm a tenant could buy with his federal loan, and the limit was so small that few such farms could be economically efficient. Ed noted that a main reason for this limit was to prevent black farmers from getting ahead. For him, the answer to this problem was obvious: encourage farmers to leave the land and join the migration to the cities where many jobs were available. But he was still wedded to some of his old FSA views: the farm loan program, with its "emphasis on planning and supervision, would be wonderfully well fitted" for the task of assisting "boldly and creatively in the reorganization of Southern agriculture." By reorganization, he appears to have meant breaking up "the large corporate land-holdings of the South and West."

That same year and in the same journal Ed pointed out the failure of the Department of Agriculture to do much about reducing farm surpluses. It spent a lot of money on research and marketing in order to find new uses for agricultural products and facilitate the sale of those that existed, but the surpluses continued to increase. What was supposed to be detached science turned out, on close

² Edward C. Banfield, "Ten Years of the Farm Tenant Purchase Program," *Journal of Farm Economics*, 31 (1949): 469-486.

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inspection, to be politically influenced science. But when he considered what might save this program from ineffectiveness, the answer still was to plan. The existing program claimed that it was planning but in fact it was not, and this was unfortunate because “planning may serve a useful purpose by changing the terms of the power struggle.” To confirm this, Ed pointed to city planning, especially the development of master plans, in which “a desirable pattern of growth” is projected “far into the future” so that existing projects can be judged by how well they conformed to the plan.³ Many years later, Ed told me that the Department of Agriculture responded to this article by saying that it did plan, but on a day-to-day basis.

He applied his argument for planning to the entire federal government, but still in the context of an empirical account of why it was not likely to work. In 1949 he published another important essay. (Modern graduate students, take note: when Ed was in your shoes, he published at least three major papers in one year.) His argument was that the congressional budget process had much to learn from planning. Budgeting, he wrote, should be a process whereby scarce funds are allocated among competing purposes “in a manner calculated to achieve the optimum result.”⁴ But in reality the budget is not that at all; instead, it is merely a collection “of bits and pieces gathered up from the various bureaus” that Congress wrongly uses as

³ Edward C. Banfield, “Planning Under the Research and Marketing Act of 1946: A Study of the Sociology of Knowledge,” *Journal of Farm Economics*, 31 (1949): 48-75 (quotations from pp. 74-5).

⁴ Edward C. Banfield, “Congress and the Budget; A Planner’s Criticism,” *American Political Science Review*, 43 (1949): 1217-1228 (quotation at p. 1219).

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a way of managing the bureaucracy. People had made various suggestions as to how this process might be improved, but none of them looked to him to be very promising. Some wanted congressional committees to have larger staffs, but no staff of any feasible size could possibly learn all that would be required to really plan. Others called for a more unified, coordinated approach to fiscal policy, but Congress had already done that in ways that have had little practical significance other than to increase its ability to manage the executive branch. And still others suggested having Congress estimate the total revenue to be spent before deciding how to spend it, but Ed saw no way whereby Congress could know in advance how much tax money would be available and no reason to think that Congress would care very much if it did know. (A quarter of a century later, the idea of a single revenue estimate and an omnibus spending bill had been adopted by Congress, with exactly the results Ed predicted.)

He went on to raise even deeper problems. There is no human way of weighing all of the uses to which funds might be put and no politically (and possibly human) means for reconciling conflicts among the goals on which these funds might be spent. And even if these problems could be overcome, how would the government deal with unanticipated events, such as a war? “[N]o full or partial answers can be given to any of these questions”; nevertheless, he adds, “it is possible to offer some tentative and partial answers.” The lessons, again, are to be found in the city planning movement and industrial scientific management. “It is true that we cannot plan when there is

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conflict over goals” but “we may hope that the time is not far off when the old notions of individualism will have given way to a more workable conception of man and society.” He does not say what this workable conception might be except to suggest that in cities, where all of the big problems have been settled, “government has become an undramatic technical matter which can safely be left to the experts.” The federal government has not yet entered this happy state, but in the meantime we can make use of a “scheme of values” to help us measure the relative value of schools and hospitals and to develop a system of social accounting that will help us assess alternative means. We cannot plan scientifically, but at least we can do so with more rather than less rationality. This planning would be done by each government bureau under the leadership of a Central Planning Agency. Every year the latter would provide Congress with a six-year financial program to implement the plan and then assess how well government actions had achieved its goals.

But within two years much of this rationalistic optimism would be in retreat, and by 1956, when as a graduate student at Chicago I met Ed, hardly a trace of it would be left. I am not certain how or under whose influence his views changed so greatly, but I suspect that there was no influence beyond his own mind. The more he thought about the facts the less likely rational planning appeared to be.

In 1951 he published his doctoral dissertation as a book, *Government Project*.⁵ (It was dedicated to Sam Hamburg, the California farmer whose financial aid had helped Ed and Laura get through some difficult times.) The volume grew

⁵ Edward C. Banfield, *Government Project* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1951).

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out of the memo he had written for the Berkeley economics professor who had been interested in the FSA. It explained how the Resettlement Administration had failed to achieve its goal, namely, to relocate desperately poor farmers onto cooperative farms that would help them overcome their miserable Depression lives. By a close study of one such farm in Casa Grande, Arizona, he was able to show that despite the dedicated and efficient efforts of honest federal bureaucrats and notwithstanding the creation of a farm that raised their incomes, the farm failed for one profound reason: the farmers would not cooperate. Though there were never more than fifty-seven families there, these settlers were unable to cooperate “because they were engaged in a ceaseless struggle for power.” That struggle may have been caused by their sense of having failed in life, by their having aggressive personalities, or by hostility toward other settlers, but whatever the cause there was no way for the farm to satisfy all of the demands for power and status. At only one time did things run more or less smoothly, and that was when, for a year or so, one government-appointed project manager made it clear that he was the boss and thus there would be no opportunities for farmers to share in his power. Ed linked this state of affairs to Chester Barnard’s theory of organizational incentives that recognizes the importance of non-economic motives. To lead, Barnard said, one must often rely on “intuitions that are correct, notwithstanding doctrines that deny their correctness.”⁶

Tugwell, who once ran the Resettlement Administration, wrote a foreword for the book in which he admitted that

⁶ Chester I. Barnard, *The Functions of the Executive* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1938), xi.

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Casa Grande was a failure—“one of many,” he added. In retrospect, “we were doomed to failure from the start.”

This book, and Ed’s reflections on the cooperative farm, are, in my opinion, the central fact of his intellectual life. In the years ahead, the central question for him became an enlarged version of the Casa Grande question: how can people be induced to cooperate? And since some degree of cooperation is essential for any society, the larger question is: how can a decent society be sustained?

In the same year that the book appeared, Ed and Tugwell published a jointly authored article that was, I suspect, Ed’s last effort to keep some life in his now eroding view that human affairs could be greatly improved by rational action. It is a remarkable essay in that it both lays out in compelling prose the many reasons why people find it hard to cooperate under some expert plan and argues that some way must be found to make them do just that. Its central argument is that we must create “governmental institutions for discovering and objectifying the future,” a need that requires Americans to ignore *Federalist* Number 10 and protect some important matters from “meddling” by legislatures and politicians. To do this, Congress must make only broad “value judgments,” leaving the contents of policy to be decided by executive-branch planners.⁷ In this way, they suggested, we can avoid having another Depression. The beginnings of this approach could be found in city planning, forestry conservation, and industrial scientific

⁷ R. G. Tugwell and E. C. Banfield, “Government Planning at Mid-Century,” *Journal of Politics*, 13 (1951): 133-163 (quotations at pp. 136, 147, and 163).

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management, but for these auspicious starts to affect the national government much more would be needed.

To answer this need the article sets forth many questions, all stated so that one might hope they could be answered in ways that favored planning but all taken together implying to the careful reader (and perhaps the reader Ed hoped to reach) that the “right” answers would not be forthcoming. The questions are these: Will the government accept permanent responsibility for the future? Can the right to private property be altered to permit more planning? Can we agree on national goals? Will Congress confine itself to making “fundamental value judgments”? Will planners acquire a rationale or theory that will give them the criteria for making choices? Can special interests be prevented from blocking the government’s efforts to build a “fiscal policy in the general interest”? Will the new Council of Economic Advisers be able to give “correct advice” so as to maintain economic stability? Will the government acquire more power to control the decisions made by businesses? Will newspapers and radio broadcasts stop relying on controversy so that an “adequate public will” can emerge?

When Tugwell and Ed wrote this, Friedrich Hayek had already argued that planners will never have the information necessary to achieve their purposes, and in trying to get that information (and power) planners would destroy human liberty. The authors recognized and rejected this argument because “there is no evidence” that planners lack the necessary information and because people do not “regard liberty...as the ultimate goal.”

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Between 1951 and 1955 Ed finally let go of the planners' illusion. In the latter year, his book with Martin Meyerson on how housing plans were made in Chicago was not called *Planning Housing*; instead, it was given the far bolder and deeper title, *Politics, Planning, and the Public Interest*.⁸ Meyerson was a consultant to the Chicago Housing Authority and kept detailed notes on its deliberations; Ed developed the theoretical basis for the book and wrote much of its contents.

The conceptual scheme for the book expressed Ed's final break from his planning legacy, for in it he laid out in tight, logical form the alternative ways in which organized human activity can be produced. In this he was influenced by his intellectual relations with Shils, the great social theorist. These twenty-five or so pages of this conceptual scheme deserve careful study, not only because in it Ed explains what he has learned but also because it sets forth a profound insight into how people manage on occasion to work together. By *politics* he meant the activity by which some human disagreement is managed. There are four ways to do this, only one of which is cooperation; the other three are contention, accommodation, and dictation. Cooperation is the most difficult of the four, because it requires that people agree on the ends to be served (which by nature rarely occurs) or on some procedural principle by which disagreements can be decided. To the extent cooperation occurs, it often is because someone—a politician, for example—has arranged for incentives to be offered to the

⁸ Martin Meyerson and Edward C. Banfield, *Politics, Planning, and the Public Interest* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1955).

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contending parties, a role that makes politicians far more important than the kind of meddling miscreants described in the Tugwell-Banfield paper.

A *plan* is a feasible and rational course of action that someone believes will achieve a set of ends. But for a plan to be rational—that is, for it to achieve a set of ends better than any alternative plan—it must be based on some unusual (and politically unlikely) circumstances. The author of the plan will have to consider all the alternative courses of action, evaluate the consequences of each alternative, and select that course that will produce the greatest gain in terms of the ends in view. In this, Ed was following the lead of Herbert A. Simon, a scholar with whom he had some disagreements but from whose definition of rationality he learned a great deal. Planning implies extraordinary knowledge (precisely the kind of knowledge that Hayek had said people will not have): the planner must be able to state all of his ends, reduce them to concrete alternatives, and evaluate each alternative. This is sometimes possible in private firms that have limited objectives, but it is rarely so in public ones that have many ends, countless courses of action, and so great a likelihood of experiencing unintended consequences that anything approaching rationality is most unlikely.

The *public interest* cannot be understood simply as a statement of what is good for society because people will not easily agree on what constitutes either the “public” or its “interest.” Indeed, there are two ways to define the public interest, the first as some unitary view of what is good for everybody and the second as the summation of individual preferences. The former conception implies government

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action, the latter market action. But Ed had no simplistic faith in markets, for as he noted some people's ends are more important than those of others (we do not, for example, weigh the pleasures of a Ku Klux Klan member the same as we weigh those of an African American seeking to buy a home in a white neighborhood). Markets are splendid ways of allocating resources among ends we regard as morally equivalent but not so good a way of doing this when important moral differences exist.

These reflections, if applied to his papers published in 1949 and 1951, would surely have caused him to revise, if not abandon entirely, many of the conclusions he had earlier reached. But he and Tugwell remained good friends even as their views became quite different.

Not long after his thesis was published in 1951, Ed, together with his wife and children, went to the small Mormon town of Gunlock, Utah, to study what he then called the "sociology of efficiency." Impressed by what he learned of the cooperative farm in Casa Grande and still under the view that planners could teach people how to farm more efficiently, Ed wanted to find out whether low-income farmers living voluntarily in a desolate area would work together any better than others had in the government-sponsored cooperative farm. When he wrote his manuscript in 1953, he concluded that the twenty-two Mormon families of Gunlock did not engage as much as they might in cooperative action and community planning.

But soon after he wrote this he and his family went to a small town in the poorest part of Southern Italy, one to which he gave the pseudonymous name of Montegrano but

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was in fact Chiramonte. His intellectual interest remained unchanged: under what circumstances will people cooperate? But now he asked the question on a broader basis. If cooperative activity was essential to economic growth, might the absence of that growth be attributed to the absence of cooperation? There was little such cooperation in Casa Grande, but these impoverished farmers had been wrenched loose from the grim hovels in which they had been living during an economic disaster. By contrast, people had lived in Montegrano since the beginning of time; still, it was desperately poor.

To explain why, he wrote a book (with the assistance of Laura), *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, that was a masterpiece, one of the great classics of modern social science.⁹ In less than two hundred small pages, Banfield destroyed the argument that some physical or economic problem kept these Italians poor. Their problems were, indeed, political; that is to say, people scarcely participated in political activities, turned strongly against whomever was elected to office, did nothing about the poor quality of schools, and would not campaign to get a hospital built there (the nearest one was five hours away). The conventional explanations for their failure to cooperate were that they were so poor and so lacking in schooling that they could not organize. As a result, the inhabitants were divided by class antagonisms, afflicted by a deep distrust of the state, and ignorant of political life.

⁹ Edward C. Banfield (with the assistance of Laura Fasano Banfield), *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1958).

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But Ed showed that each of the explanations was either wrong or seriously incomplete. They were indeed poor, but each had a lot of free time that could easily be donated to some community undertaking. They were uneducated (many were illiterate), but they understood at least as much as working-class Americans about politics and parties. The rich and the poor led separate lives, but the poor made no effort to organize against the largely powerless and civically idle rich, nor, when they voted, did they usually vote along class lines. And they did not pathologically distrust the state; when interviewed, they tended to give balanced, ordinary assessments of people in government.

The central difference between the people of Montegrano and those in Gunlock Utah, where natural resources are as scarce as in Southern Italy, is that in the American town people cooperated industriously: they contributed to the church and to other, often distant, causes; they formed voluntary associations, campaigned for local improvements, and worked to support the schools. This difference in cooperation, Ed explained, was the result of the Montegrane acting as if they followed this rule: maximize the material, short-run interest of the nuclear family, and assume that everyone else will do the same. This attitude he called amoral familism, and its existence was consistent with a psychological assessment—the Thematic Apperception Test—that he gave to many residents. People cared very much for their own families and not at all for other people. The ethos that made them amoral familists arose, Ed speculated, out of an abiding fear of premature death, a land

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tenure system that made the formation of extended families very difficult, and other factors too complex to understand.

When he had finished with this book, his earlier manuscript on Gunlock was now obviously useless. It had been written on the wrong assumption that these Mormon farmers did not cooperate *enough*, when in fact they cooperated to an extraordinary degree. Once the presuppositions of a rationalistic planner had been abandoned, human beings could be seen clearly and cultures distinguished from one another, not on the grounds of some idealistic standard, but on the basis on how people really behaved.

The *Moral Basis*, later to be regarded by many scholars as a work for the ages, was largely ignored when it appeared. It was first printed as photocopied typescript and it was rarely reviewed. Scholars were not yet ready to accept “culture” as the answer to any practical question. Surely the answers must be money, leadership, and planning. Ed said that, important as these things may be up to a point, they did not explain the fundamental facts. A third of a century after it appeared, it was cited approvingly in Robert Putnam’s important book on how democracy works (or fails to work) in contemporary Italy.¹⁰

At this point Ed might well have returned to Gunlock to get a fresh view of its communal life, but his empirical research (though not his intellectual focus) was changed by a generously funded invitation to write a book about Chicago politics. He examined several case studies of that city’s civic

¹⁰ Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).

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issues and made them the factual core of an impressive account of human conflict and political leadership. The book was about one way of achieving human cooperation—the use of influence. In thinking through these matters, he was aided by research on Chicago business elites then being done by a graduate student, Peter B. Clark, who wrote one of the book’s chapters. To Ed, influence—the ability to get others to act as you intend—was essential in American politics because people disagreed about means and ends and because governmental authority was highly fragmented. When he wrote, influence had become a hot topic in American political science, but much of what was written about it was based on opinion polls about who had “power” or exercised “leadership.” These approaches led, of course, to unreliable generalizations about the great (and, as the authors supposed, adverse) influence of business leaders on government decisions. Ed wanted to know how concrete issues were actually decided, and so he studied six major controversies in Chicago and drew his conclusions about influence from his detailed account of who did what for (or to) whom.¹¹

Civic issues in Chicago, he concluded, did not result from struggles for votes, competing ideologies, or the work of some shadowy power elite; they arose instead from the maintenance and enhancement needs of large organizations. One organization (say, a hospital) wanted something, another organization (say, a rival hospital) opposed it. The resulting conflict had to be managed if it were to be settled at all, and in Chicago politicians did most of the managing.

¹¹ Edward C. Banfield, *Political Influence* (New York: Free Press, 1961).

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But that management was hardly dictatorial. Though Chicago politics was organized around a powerful political machine, the machine did not simply impose its will. Instead, its leader, the mayor, let every interest get its say, postponed decisions until some common ground could be found, and then nudged the contestants in that direction.

To many people—and to Ed when he believed in planning—the great defect of the Chicago system was that it did not provide “sufficient central direction.” If that central direction had been imposed, planners (and a younger Ed) would have claimed that the result would have been a “comprehensive and consistent policy” that was more in accord with the public interest. But the new Ed argued the opposite. The politically managed results were in his judgment remarkably good. People might disagree about how some issues were resolved, but to him these outcomes were ones he would have chosen had he been making “decisions.” In Chicago, of course, the outcomes were less the result of decisions than of protracted exercises in political influence. But despite the fact that the “wrong” reasons (that is, reasons that were illogical, irrelevant, or even improper) governed the outcomes, the latter were correct. But even if you disagreed with this judgment, you must still admit that often “obviously wrong” reasons will, at least sometimes, lead to results that are “not obviously wrong.” Politicians were no longer people who ought to be confined to making broad value judgments, leaving to experts the role of making choices. Rather because of time they spend discovering and evaluating the probable consequences of an action, politicians tend to improve the

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outcome even when they decide, as they sometimes do, that nothing needs to be done.

When the book was in manuscript form, Ed took it to Mayor Richard Daley to get his reaction, saying that he could not promise to change anything to which the mayor objected but that he would take his views into account. In time, he was summoned to Daley's office where the mayor was in a rage. Ed worried that he was in for big trouble. "You can't print this," the mayor fumed. "You quote me uttering some vulgar comments. Don't you know my daughter is a nun? What is she going to think when she reads this?" Ed promised to remove the vulgarities.

In 1959 Ed left Chicago and accepted an appointment as a professor of government at Harvard where Martin Meyerson, who had earlier taken a post there as a professor of planning, had urged Ed's selection. There he decided to put his argument about politicians onto a larger scale by writing a general book on city politics. He recruited me as his coauthor and we began writing the book while my wife, son and I spent the summer of 1961 living with the Banfields on their Vermont farm. From the first it was obvious that he no longer believed in his 1949 view that city government is an "undramatic technical matter which can safely be left to experts." City government was about politics, and a good thing, too. On the very first page, the reader is told that that day-to-day workings of city government are best understood "by looking at the differences of opinion and interest that exist within cities, at the issues that arise out of these differences, and at the ways

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institutions function to resolve (or fail to resolve) them.”¹² That may all seem obvious today, but when we wrote, most of the published studies of urban affairs were administrative accounts of how the cities were organized. When you read those scholarly books about cities, you learned more about appointed than elected officials, routine than fundamental issues, and legal arrangements than informal political influence.

To us, what was crucial in understanding politics was to grasp the importance of rival political views, including, of course, that between the rich and the poor, whites and blacks, and suburbanites and city dwellers, but also the deeper cultural conflict between those who want to do good for the city “as a whole” and those who want the city to help them as individuals. The former want efficiency, impartiality, honesty, nonpartisanship, planning, and strong executives; the latter want help, favors, personal support, and influential legislators who can help neighborhoods. This competition between the ethos of two opposed cultural groups was, we argued, the most profound force shaping city life and could be used to understand why some cities had embraced a “reform” style of government and others had resisted it. We later developed that view in studies of voting behavior and public opinion, distinguishing empirically between what we came to call the “unitary” and the “individualist” ethos.¹³

¹² Edward C. Banfield and James Q. Wilson, *City Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), 1.

¹³ James Q. Wilson and Edward C. Banfield, “Public-Regardingness as a Value Premise in Voting Behavior,” *American Political Science Review*, 58 (1964): 876-887, and Wilson and Banfield, “Political Ethos Revisited,” *American Political Science Review*, 65 (1971): 1048-1062.

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The book had a chapter on master planning, but in it we quickly admitted that very little of this went on in America. Real planners did something rather different: They gathered facts, drew up zoning ordinances, and oversaw the design of particular projects. This kind of “planning in the small” was often feasible, but “planning in the large”—designing a plan for the shape and growth of an entire city—was not. Indeed, planning in the small often made planning in the large impossible. Experienced planners had discovered that the decentralization of authority in the city meant that there was no way whereby experts could design something based on the general interest. And so the chapter was really not about master planning at all but about theorists who had argued that somehow this kind of planning was desirable. The theorists were easily refuted, and so in this chapter, written by Ed, his earlier fascination with planning was given its funeral.

By the early 1960s, the intellectually mature Ed was in place. Planning, and any other strategy to organize and rationalize society on the basis of reason alone, was suspect; politicians played a far more important and desirable role than experts because they paid attention to cleavages of opinion and especially to those that reflected a fundamental disagreement about how government should be organized; and the long and settled experience of mankind that has been fortunate enough to live in a democratic society is the best test for what works.

* * *

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The book that brought Ed to public notice was, of course, *The Unheavenly City*, a title taken from a phrase used by Cotton Mather in 1710 when he urged Americans to join him in seeking out a “heavenly city” inhabited by an “innumerable company of angels, and by the spirits of just men.” Real cities, Ed said, were inhabited by real people, not angels, and by ones that are only just some of the time.

The idea for the book grew out of a series of commentaries that Ed and Martin Meyerson had written for a Boston bank; the bank published them as educational advertisements. They were later gathered into a book entitled *Boston: The Job Ahead*. Ed was never quite satisfied with the product; it was limited by its focus on Boston and too narrow in its approach to urban reality. But like the ads, his new book, Ed wrote, was not so much a work of social science as a view of urban life informed by what other social scientists had learned.

The central problem of cities—central in the sense that it is both important and resistant to any feasible solution—is that its life is shaped by differing cultures, and in the view of people who display these cultures the standards by which urban life should be judged are always rising faster than the (real) progress cities have made in meeting human needs. Many people thought the cities faced a crisis because observers judge cities by constantly rising standards. If people judged cities by a fixed standard, then by many measures—personal income, housing quality, and cultural opportunities—the cities have done well. But even with a fixed standard, they have not done so well in crime and scarcely much better with respect to education.

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Crime and education have one thing in common: much depends on what a possible criminal or an incoming student brings to the enterprise. And to understand that, one must investigate the culture that each has, a culture that is the product of social class. As we have seen, to Ed class was a state of consciousness based on a person's attitude toward time. The longer a person's time horizon, the greater his willingness to defer present pleasures for future benefits, the more convinced he is that his own behavior will largely determine what the future will bring, and so the higher his (or her) class position. Ed tried to make it clear that social class, thus defined, is not the same as income or race. There are impoverished medical students who are upper class (they are studying hard for higher incomes that are years in the future) and there are self-indulgent sons of rich fathers who are lower class (they are spending their inherited wealth on immediate pleasures with little thought to the future). Similarly there are upper-, and middle-, and lower-class blacks just as there are upper-, and middle-, and lower-class whites. Immigrants to the United States may arrive with nothing in their pockets; they will be poor, but their future, and that of their children, will depend heavily on how much they bet on the future. But the proportion of people who are both rich and truly upper-class will be high; if it were not, few would be rich except by inheriting a fortune or hitting the jackpot. And there will also be a high correlation between being poor and being lower class; if there were not, the ranks of the poor would decline sharply as economic growth created even small opportunities for advancement. America has greatly rewarded people who were interested in

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the future. At one time, the cities were composed mostly of poorly paid workers; now they are mostly composed of well-paid members of the middle class.

This argument was, of course, the main reason why Ed's book was so successful (after it was published in 1970 it went through twenty-two printings, selling tens of thousands of copies, and then was published in a revised form in 1974) and why it was so hated. One scholar called it "patent racism" and another compared it to social Darwinism by attaching to it the hostile label, "survival of the fittest." There were also many positive reviews, and some magazines published colloquia on the book. The core questions for almost every reviewer were race and class. Ed understood this reaction. To him, intellectuals were often paralyzed by their ideological commitments to good race relations or to narrowing the income gap even though programs based on those commitments often did little to improve race relations or change economic prospects. His argument was a powerful denial of the suitability of some commonplace programs (such as the minimum wage and compulsory high school) and many pet projects (such as the War on Poverty, the Great Society, and a domestic Marshall Plan).

The hostile critics ignored much of what Ed wrote. His argument was cultural, not biological; it found a lower-class culture among every ethnic group and not just among African Americans; it never denied that progress was possible (indeed, it predicted that a significant part of the lower class would disappear as a result of economic growth, the declining birth rate, and the relentless spread of middle-class values). What it did deny was that professional

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problem-solvers and their upper-middle-class allies were likely to make much of a difference.

After the book came out, Ed had to decide how it should be incorporated in his Harvard class on urban problems. He decided to assign the book to be read in the first few days, when the class would not meet, and then ask the students to come to the first meeting prepared to pass a quiz about it. The quiz, it turned out, was very simple: criticize this book in a way that shows you have read it. And Ed, being an easy grader, rarely discovered a student who could not pass that test. The combination of a well-known author and an easy test made for a very large enrollment. The course was then devoted to inviting in critics of his book so that they could try to persuade the students that they were right.

It was a remarkable class, unlike any other at Harvard. It made a serious effort to prove that the instructor was wrong. Some of the critics he invited were civil rights activists, others were Marxists, and still others were skeptical psychologists. Many of the criticisms that the students heard were sharp-edged, even radical. Some of the critics, like many of the reviewers, utterly misrepresented what Ed had written, but Ed sat through it all. As he later said, he rarely blames people for much. Problems exist because of some combination of culture, personality, and politics. The first can't be changed, the second shouldn't be, and the third is constrained by the first two. Hearing his critics, of course, reinforced Ed's great skepticism of intellectual elites and strengthened his admiration for practical ones.

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Though Harvard students were fascinated by his course, those elsewhere mobilized to attack him. In Canterbury, England, he was denounced by the faculty; at the University of Toronto he was assailed by a mob of students. And saddest of all, he was harassed by students at his old love, the University of Chicago. These experiences depressed him and made Laura uneasy.

He decided it was time to strike out in a new direction, and so he entered into an agreement with the Twentieth Century Fund to write a book about public support of the arts. The Fund had been impressed by a 1972 essay he had written on public libraries in which he argued that they seem to have lost a sense of purpose.¹⁴ They were doing some things that they cannot or should not do and neglecting other things that they ought to do. They devoted much energy to helping light readers even though this serves no public purpose and very little effort to serious readers despite the gains that (Ed assumed) would come from such an effort. The Fund probably supposed that Ed would bring the same sense of higher purpose to art museums; if so, it was quite mistaken.

After much thought and reading, Ed concluded that public support of art is undesirable. There is a public interest; it has to do with what benefits citizens generally by meeting their need for what is right and just and for settling principles as to how social decisions ought to be made. (This unitary view of the public interest departs a bit, but I think

¹⁴ Edward C. Banfield, "Some Alternatives for the Public Library," *Here the People Rule*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1991), 349-60. The essay was first published in 1972.

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only by way of emphasis, from his earlier individualistic view that stressed the satisfaction of human wants.) The public welfare, he wrote, is served by a tax-supported courthouse but not by a tax-supported statue in front of it. The courthouse administers justice, the statue confers pleasure. It is not the task of government to confer pleasure unless you think (as some nineteenth-century writers did suppose) that art elevates and refines public tastes. But today scarcely any artist believes that; for them, art exists for its own sake, which often involves shocking or even offending the public.

Moreover, public subsidies for art are economically irrational. They transfer wealth from poorer people to richer ones (since most museum patrons are relatively well-off), subsidize a self-interested art establishment, take the place of reasonable user charges that most people could easily pay, and lead the government to define (by its grants) what constitutes art. All of this was written before the National Endowment for the Arts had become an agency giving grants to many absurd or hard-to-defend “artists”; once again, Banfield made a correct prediction. The public’s interest in art would be better met by selling reproductions of paintings and statues that are of such high quality that only an expert with an electron microscope could tell that they are not the originals. That way everybody could enjoy art without first having to travel to a big city to see the uncopied original.¹⁵ His proposal was, of course, denounced by art critics, both conservative and liberal, and by virtually

¹⁵ Edward C. Banfield, *The Democratic Muse* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), and Banfield, “Art and the Public Interest,” in *Here the People Rule*, 361-72. (The essay was written in 1986.)

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every art organization. It was curious, he added, that his idea had no merit when the same critics endorse televising opera performances (that is, making copies of the original) and selling recordings of music (some of which are bad copies of the composer's intent).

* * *

"I am a vintage Burkean," Ed would later say. I am convinced that "society exists on the basis of habits and beliefs" that are at risk from the challenge of the "cold light of reason." One can sit down and try to think up better ways to do things, but "the more you think about [such ideas], the more problematic they become." We have deluded ourselves into thinking that people are reasonable, he added, but in fact reason only rarely governs us; passions are usually more important.

It could be argued that, on important matters, reason rarely governed him. When he and Laura left Chicago for Harvard, it was not because they were lured by Harvard but because Ed felt rejected by Chicago. This is odd, since he never abandoned the idea that Chicago was the best university in America, certainly far more interesting intellectually than Harvard. The latter place, he later observed, was more divided by rank and custom than the former. At the Chicago faculty club, people sat at round tables where almost immediately a seminar would begin; at the Harvard faculty club, you either sat at tables for two or at one long table where the conversation was, at best, about parking problems and faculty gossip. If this is true, why did

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he leave a place he adored for one at which he felt increasingly uncomfortable? Because, he said, he thought Chicago had not met financially the Harvard offer at a time when Ed and Laura had two children preparing for college. But lower pay had not prevented him from leaving the FSA for Chicago, even when Chicago offered no guaranteed post. As on many occasions, he formulated a good reason for an action that was in fact done on intuitive grounds. In going to Harvard, he seems to have hoped that it would be nice to learn about another university and its region.

When he got to New England in 1959, he and Laura drove up to Vermont to see an old friend from Farm Bureau days. They learned that an acquaintance wanted to sell his farm. After spending twenty or thirty minutes glancing at it (they never even examined the home's second floor), the Banfields made a down payment on it using almost all of their paltry cash reserves. Ed explained to Laura that it was best not to shop around because it takes time away from enjoying what you want. This remark was a wonderful justification for the kind of present-oriented behavior he thought was characteristic of the lower class. (By contrast, Milton and Rose Friedman spent years looking for the right New England spot on which to build a house.)

And when he left Harvard in 1972 to take a professorship at the University of Pennsylvania, it was not because his old friend, Martin Meyerson, who was then the president of Penn, talked him into it. Ed simply decided to go. He had friends there, of course, but afterwards he said that at Harvard he felt he was drying up. He wanted a new

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environment. But when he got there, he found the environment, though new, was not altogether friendly.

Bonnie Blustein, a Harvard undergraduate and self-described Marxist, had been active in the Students for a Democratic Society and the Committee Against Racism. In May 1972 she with others broke into and occupied my Harvard office (I was then chairman of the Department of Government). The faculty-student disciplinary committee suspended her for one year. She returned in June 1973 to get her degree. She then began graduate studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Having discovered that Professor Banfield was teaching there, she organized a protest against him. One day she and her colleagues entered his classroom carrying a trophy that she tried to present to Ed, calling him the racist of the year. Ed had known they were coming and had alerted the campus security officers. They were in the class and intercepted Blustein. She was hauled before a faculty committee, but she broke up that meeting as well. After the committee met again, protected by guards, it found her guilty of disrupting a class, but gave her a trivial penalty. Ed complained to the provost who said there was nothing he could do (he did not even make a public statement condemning her actions). Ed began to realize that this had never happened to him at Harvard, and so when the Government Department invited him back, he returned in 1976.

Ed's own behavior on important matters makes him appear to be as present-oriented as any member of the lower class. If this were his ordinary mode of thinking, one would predict that, based on his theories, he was a juvenile

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delinquent as an adolescent and a faithless husband and errant father as an adult. But of course he was only reckless on important things—where to live, what job to take. On everyday matters he was a slave of reason who brooded about the future, worried about the larger implications of ordinary actions, and thought deeply about fundamental issues, especially those about the nature of society.

To Ed, human beings are governed more by passion than by reason. This was a common view in the eighteenth century and of that era's men whom he greatly admired—John Adams, David Hume, and Samuel Johnson. “All of society's problems are at bottom moral problems,” Ed later said. They can often be managed, but only by discussion and even then the discussion is not always on an entirely rational level. “When things work, it is always a bit of a mystery.” What is most remarkable is that there is order in society, especially in a world in which schooling the young has become so important. He valued education and devoted his life to it, but he always said that “thinking is an inherently dangerous business” because it tends to produce a society of moral relativists. In a 1983 essay he wrote that when one “encounters a grandmother who has been sucking eggs for many decades with conspicuous success, one ought to hesitate before presuming to instruct her in the theory of egg-sucking.”

To manage passions in political systems, as James Madison wrote in the *Federalist* papers, “ambition must be made to counteract ambition,” and politicians must be skilled at finding the terms on which people can agree and do this within a legal framework that protects minority

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rights. People are ordinarily very good at managing their own affairs but less able at managing those of others, and so when they think as citizens they tend to favor a more democratic politics (even when restraints on democracy are desirable), policies that will have many unintended and undesirable consequences, and actions based on private morality even though governmental affairs cannot be run in accordance with the Sermon on the Mount.¹⁶ Given these views, Ed even thought the American founding was a happy accident rather than a careful plan, and that those Founders whom many admire, such as James Madison, presented many inappropriate constitutional ideas that were improved by discussion and debate.

When he was a student at Chicago, the people he found most helpful were those who tried to explain that social order. Herbert Blumer and Edward Shils worked at this problem, and Leo Strauss set the problem into the larger context of philosophical understanding.

Ed thought Strauss was a genius but never became a Straussian. When Ed left Chicago for Harvard, Strauss spoke at the faculty dinner at which Ed was guest of honor. Strauss had tried in vain to interest Ed in natural law, arguing that since Ed was a man of principle, and since natural law was merely the sum of principles on which honest men usually act, Ed must respect natural law. But Ed would have none of it. “His innate impishness,” Strauss said, “does not permit him to conceive of his actions as dictated by any law, natural

¹⁶ *Here the People Rule*, xiii-xx, 341-44.

¹⁷ Edward C. Banfield, “Freedom and the Market,” *National Review* (November 20, 1962): 401-3.

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or non-natural.” Ed prefers, Strauss continued, to trace the best in him to whim and mood. When Ed bought the Vermont farm, it was whim and mood at work, but whim and mood that led to years of happy satisfaction.

After Strauss died in 1973, Ed returned his compliments in a commemorative essay. Ed recalled having been in the first class Strauss taught at Chicago and the great scholar’s difficulty in deciding whether to smoke in a room that had a “No Smoking” sign prominently displayed. Ed responded by taking the sign down, an act that began their friendship. To Strauss, Ed was a prudent man, high praise indeed from a profound student of Aristotle. The two men discovered that they both were critics of modernity, Strauss because modern men had wrongly concluded that they could dispense with the idea of virtue, Banfield because they had often become so preoccupied with a self-expression that is little different from crude hedonism. But neither Strauss nor Banfield ever suggested a philosophical or practical position by which any of the evils of modernity could be overcome. Neither thought a solution possible; after all, many of the greatest minds disagreed about the right course of action. But in the meantime both felt it important to be loyal to the best regime available, and to both that regime was the United States of America.

Nor was Ed a libertarian. Though a great friend of Milton Friedman, without doubt the most important libertarian of our time, and though a great admirer of free markets for those things that could be profitably exchanged in markets, Ed knew the limits of markets. In a review of Friedman’s book, *Capitalism and Freedom*, in the conservative

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journal *National Review*, Ed praised the book but held back from recommending it strongly to those readers who, being conservative, were too likely to accept all of Friedman's conclusions. Ed did not believe that personal freedom was the highest human goal and hence did not believe that any market transaction, voluntarily entered into by free men, would necessarily produce the best outcome. The reason is simple: If freedom is the highest good, then there is no way of judging market transactions other than to say they were freely made. But merely because they were freely made does not make them good. If one man wants to buy a slave and another man agrees to be his slave in exchange for money, slavery would be good. But we know that slavery is bad for it deprives one person of his humanity and separates him from the fruits of his own labor. People ought to value freedom but other things as well, especially a "consensual order which permits reasonable discussion, the exercise of reason itself, and whatever substantive values the exercise of reason recommends."¹⁷

As the economists began to expand their intellectual domain and make inroads on political science, Ed wrote two essays that supplied a profound critique of the limits of economic analysis, a critique that did nothing to limit economic imperialism but did at least provide, far sooner than did anyone else, a careful explanation of what those limits were. Economics, he said, was about aggregating individual preferences when those preferences are stable, are known in advance, and can be made subject to some rule that enables an observer to predict an outcome knowing only the preferences. These preferences could in theory be

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measured in several ways, but in practice and of necessity, they are almost always measured in money terms. Politics, on the other hand, is about a world in which preferences are not known, can be changed, and are not readily measured on a money scale.¹⁸ Money maximization is of great value to economists because it gives to them quantitative, objective and (reasonably) accessible information and enables them to make definite predictions that can be tested. By contrast, political science must deal with people who change their minds, whose preferences may be hard to discover, who have no common scale by which preferences can be measured, and whose actions may be illegal, corrupt, dutiful, other-regarding, or altruistic. Studying politics is difficult and produces few easily testable propositions. Indeed, economists cannot even explain why people vote since the act of voting imposes costs and yet supplies no benefits except in the extraordinarily rare circumstance when one vote happens to decide the election. Though these warnings were written over 35 years ago, they have done nothing to stop the unhelpful (but publishable) imposition of economic “models” onto politics.

* * *

Ed had a gruff manner but a ready laugh. He loved jokes and hated to eat alone; at his home a party was often underway and at his farm there was a steady stream of

¹⁸ Edward C. Banfield, “Economic Analysis of Political Problems” and “Are *Homo Economicus* and *Homo Politicus* Kin?” in *Here the People Rule*, 373-95. The first essay was originally written in 1967.

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guests. His gruffness never bothered the undergraduates he taught in part because he was very fond of them and they of him. He prepared his lectures carefully and lingered after each one in order to answer every student's questions. He was always available to see them and was convinced that every one was entitled to at least the grade of B. If they did something better than ordinary, they would get an A. For all of these reasons, his classes were popular.

Teaching, he later remarked, is a process of moving by a series of untruths and errors toward the truth—if you ever get there. As a scholar, Ed was dedicated to doing what social scientists are supposed to do, namely, finding simple or general explanations for a variety of complex behaviors. But as a teacher he thought it best to challenge the minds of students by making their view of the world more complicated and difficult so that they would no longer take for granted what they had routinely supposed was the truth. He found this easiest to do with undergraduates: “they are more willing to have their opinions challenged and to challenge yours.” He rarely was difficult with them; he was much more likely to be difficult with superordinates than with subordinates. An aloof doctor or an incompetent dean made him angry; a slow student made him helpful. As he once said, “I am the most patient impatient man I know.”

With graduate students he was less optimistic. He liked to say that those who can learn don't have to be taught, but he was wrong. Those who can learn first need to be shown that there is something important, and not merely trivial, worth learning and then shown, by the relentless application of a critical intellect, how to learn it without merely

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embracing some fashionable idea. Ed had the best critical intellect of any man I have ever known, and I think all of his graduate students would agree—sometimes with sharp memories of the pain his criticisms inflicted. But Ed was toughest on himself. He rewrote and edited his own materials endlessly, always searching for a way to use one word where two had been written. “Write for your grandmother,” Ed told me. He paid a price for this extraordinary lucidity, of course. By making his views exceptionally clear, he exposed himself to criticisms that he might have avoided had he cast his thoughts in the clumsy, jargon-ridden language of much of modern social science.

He was an extraordinary scholar, utterly devoted to finding and stating what he thought was true, and doing so with unmatched personal bravery. He never understood why anyone would call him a racist; his friends knew that he did not have a racist bone in his body. He described, complete with every necessary nuance and qualification, the world as he saw it, and if with respect to some generalization there were more African Americans in one category than in another, this was simply a fact that needed to be explained, not one to be denied or ignored. Since his intellect was devoted to explaining in lucid prose practical matters of considerable importance, his work was accessible to people who had a practical, rather than an intellectual, interest. He bridged the gap between the ivory tower and the person on the street better than anyone else and in a way that never compromised intellectual integrity.

My favorite passage from Ed’s writings is this one, penned in 1961 at one of the many conferences that he

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attended, organized by Robert Goldwin. Ed disliked conferences generally and only joined the American Political Science Association after they told him they were about to make him their vice president, but Goldwin's meetings, devoted to hard thinking by serious people about a central political issue, appealed to him. In this essay, Ed defends the American political party system against the many people who then, and even more so today, seek to end it.

A political system is an accident. It is an accumulation of habits, customs, prejudices, and principles that have survived a long process of trial and error and of ceaseless response to changing circumstance. If the system works well on the whole, it is a lucky accident—the luckiest, indeed, that can befall a society, for all of the institutions of the society, and thus its entire character and that of the human types formed within it, depend ultimately upon the government and the political order.”¹⁹

Ed died peacefully on September 30, 1999. His doctors told Laura that his death did not flow from any particular disease. His body had just stopped living.



¹⁹ Edward C. Banfield, “In Defense of the American Party System,” in *Here the People Rule*, 70. (The essay was first published in 1961.)

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**REMARKS AT FAREWELL TO
E. C. BANFIELD ON DEPARTURE
FROM CHICAGO**

BY LEO STRAUSS

Our chairman has asked me to bid farewell to Edward Banfield. I suppose he asked me to do this because he knows that Mr. Banfield and I are particularly close to one another. This is true and thus justifies this request that I should speak tonight in the name of the Department. But it also creates a difficulty: shall I speak as a close friend of Banfield's, or for the Department? I must find the proper mean between the indelicacy of imputing to the Department my feelings toward Banfield and the vagueness which would follow if I were to identify myself with the *opinion moyenne* of the Department—to say nothing of the difficulty to find out what that average opinion is. Under no circumstances will I make an advance obituary, although for some people it is a great pleasure to hear their obituaries while they can still hear them: a complete list of all their virtues and a complete silence about their vices. Parting is sad—but it is not parting forever. So I shall keep one eye dry. I know I speak in the name of every member of the Department when I say that we are very sad to lose you because you are a very good scholar and teacher and colleague. I shall not say more on this subject because our fields are so different. I prefer to speak of your qualities as a human being—of qualities which

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incidentally contribute much to scholarship. I will do so in a way which, I hope, agrees with your taste, if not with everyone's taste. I shall not speak of your integrity—or complete freedom from pretense. Nor shall I speak of your charity—you yourself prefer to conceal your charity under a shell of bluntness and gruffness. You succeed quite well in this: not everyone in this room, I imagine, will agree with me when I say that you are a man of unusual charity. I shall speak instead of your sense of humor which suffuses your integrity and your charity and enhances these moral qualities and makes them to me, at any rate, particularly attractive—that sense of humor of yours which appears to the uninitiated sometimes as impishness, not to say as sheer perverseness. Sense of humor is not easy to define. It is surely a form of the sense for the ridiculous. The ridiculous, we have learned, is primarily the strange, the deviation which is innocuous (e.g., to grow a beard on one side of the face). Sense of humor, I think, consists in being open to the ridiculous strangeness of the customary or the normal—of what we ordinarily take very seriously. We cannot live without a bit of make-believe and we are not always sufficiently aware of this fact. You are unusually aware of it. Take the case of Department meetings and especially of meetings dealing with questions of appointments. Wholly inconclusive arguments are advanced on both sides of the question—for the question invariably arises as to the judgment of the speakers as well as of the outsiders who recommend a given candidate. If a man is to be appointed the question whether he has judgment or not can be freely discussed; but once he is appointed this question can no

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longer be raised with propriety: we must act on the dubious assumption that he is a man of judgment. It is a kind of circle, not a vicious circle, but a merry circle. This state of things on which much more could be said is not altogether depressing. To quote Mr. Banfield's favorite limerick:

There was a young man from out East
Who tried to grasp the big beast
His traps did not work, his models were not right
But then he heard a voice in his night:
"Look at the small group which thou seest."

Unfortunately that young man did not understand the voice: he built telescopes through which he could not see any small group, and microscopes through which he could see only tiny segments of a group—he never got a good macroscopic look at a small group. Mr. Banfield, on the other hand, goes thinkingly through Department meetings and he thus got hold of a clue to political life in general. Naturally he never forgets the difference between such groups as a Department of Political Science and a nation: the fact that an American father and an American mother ordinarily generate an American baby, whereas an offspring of a marriage between a political scientist father and a political scientist mother is not ordinarily a baby political scientist.

On the basis of this and similar insights we had a substantial agreement from the moment we met for the first time—an agreement which extended, I am happy to say, although on a different basis, to our ladies. We never had the

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slightest friction. We did have a running fight through these many years. The fight concerns natural law. I vainly tried to convince Mr. Banfield that being an honest man he was a principled man, he acted on principles, and natural law is nothing but an attempt to spell out the principles on which honest men act and have acted and will act as long as there are men. But my friend cannot bear the sound of natural law. His innate impishness does not permit him to conceive of his actions as dictated by any law, natural or non-natural—he is not pleased if he cannot trace the best in him to whim and to mood—to his mere liking and even to his liking it at the moment. In a word, his relativism is a very *individual* relativism—it is so because he is a character, a rugged individual—not a mere rugged individualist, for in order to be an individualist one does not have to be an individual. Being an individual he is not a calculating man: not a time server and not a men server and, whether he likes it or not, he is a good citizen in the City of God: i.e., a man who knows that he would rebel against Providence if he were even to wish for the disappearance of calculating men and of time servers.

From all this I draw the conclusion—and I come to the conclusion—that I shall miss you very much. And I hope I speak for all my colleagues if I add: we all shall miss you very much. But we are not so sorry for losing you as not to wish you a very happy life and a very great career at another University which, it must be confessed, is inferior to ours in everything except endowment and old age.



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Banfield's Enduring Insights

Thomas Sowell

A giant has died—a giant in an age of pygmies: Edward C. Banfield, best known for his book *The Unheavenly City*. This classic analysis of urban problems remains as fresh and as relevant today as it was when it was first published in 1970. If anything, its incisive analysis is even more urgently needed today, to cut through the fashionable fallacies and political cant that dominate discussions of urban problems and policies.

The title of Mr. Banfield's book was meant to challenge the idea that cities today face unique problems. Cities were never heavenly. Nor are things getting worse. Today, the “overwhelming majority of city dwellers live more comfortably and conveniently than ever before,” Mr. Banfield said. The Jewish gangs of the early 20th century were basically very similar to the black gangs of today, according to Mr. Banfield. Urban crime and congestion were worse in the 19th century.

Group segregation in urban ghettos is not new. Mr. Banfield pointed out that the whites of Northern and Southern European ancestry lived so separately from one

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another in America that you would have had to move half the Southern Europeans to get a random mixture of the two groups. Other studies in the United States and overseas have shown similarly segregated residential patterns among people who may be physically indistinguishable but who nevertheless separate along social lines.

Discussions of “the poor” today still fail to take into account what Mr. Banfield pointed out a decade ago—that there is a substantial turnover among people in poverty. This is not a permanent class of people. Subsequent research by others has confirmed that Americans in general do not stay in the same income bracket for more than a few years.

Not only did *The Unheavenly City* challenge our vision of urban problems, it challenged many of the politically fashionable solutions. Government programs to upgrade the skills of the underclass seemed to Mr. Banfield to be missing the point. It was “not so much possession of skills,” he said, that was needed but “possession of certain qualities—reliability, motivation to learn, and adaptability to the demands of the work.”

The fundamental problems of the urban underclass were neither economic nor racial, but cultural. Moreover, these lower-class cultural deficiencies remained largely the same, whether those living in the slums were Irish in the 19th century or blacks in the 20th century.

Nor was schooling the answer according to Mr. Banfield. He argued that children were in fact being kept in school too many years already—and that their frustration at their boring confinement was behind much misbehavior and negative attitudes. He suggested that what was being taught in 12

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years could be covered in nine—and the students released from bondage.

The urban riots of the 1960s were seen by others as uprisings of the oppressed, but Mr. Banfield titled one of his chapters “Rioting Mainly for Fun and Profit.” He did not regard happy looters as embittered proletarians. He pointed out that affluent college students were rioting across the country at the same time urban blacks were rioting.

Mr. Banfield’s cultural explanations of urban social problems were anathema to those who were in the habit of blaming “society.” Mr. Banfield was accused of “blaming the victim” and he was both denounced and demonized. Cries of “racism” rang out, though in fact he had pointed out numerous parallels between the behavior patterns of 20th century urban blacks and 19th century behavior patterns among various white ethnic groups.

Even before writing *The Unheavenly City*, Mr. Banfield had shown the same cultural explanations of social patterns in a study of an entirely different setting—a village in Southern Italy. In both books, he showed how a particular cultural inheritance could be a serious handicap to some groups. Here was none of the fashionable fraud of pretending that all cultures are equally beneficial.

As one of the first to challenge the fashionable social theories of the 1960s, Edward Banfield was also one of the first to feel the backlash of demonization. One of the gentlest of men and one of the wisest and best informed scholars of his time, he was shamelessly caricatured as a hate-filled monster.

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The disastrous social trends that began in the 1960s—soaring crime rates, disintegrating families, rising welfare dependency—are a testament to the truths Mr. Banfield wrote about. Our belated attempts to turn such social tragedies around are the real monument to his memory and his work.

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The Man Who Knew Too Much

James Q. Wilson

In the increasingly dull, narrow, methodologically obscure world of the social sciences, it is hard to find a mind that speaks not only to its students but to its nation. Most scholars can't write, many can't think. Ed Banfield could write and think.

When he died a few days ago, his life gave new meaning to the old saw about being a prophet without honor in your own country. Almost everything he wrote was criticized at the time it appeared for being wrong-headed. In 1955, he and Martin Meyerson published an account of how Chicago built public housing projects in which they explained how mischievous these projects were likely to be: tall, institutional buildings filled with tiny apartments built in areas that guaranteed racial segregation. All this was to be done on the basis of the federal Housing Act of 1949, which said little about what goals housing was to achieve or why other ways of financing it—housing vouchers, for example— should not be available. This was heresy to the authors of the law and to most right-thinking planners.

Within two decades, high-rise public housing was widely viewed as a huge mistake and efforts were made to create vouchers so that poor families could afford to rent housing in the existing market. Local authorities in St. Louis had dynamited a big housing project there after describing it as a hopeless failure. It is not likely that Ed and Martin's book received much credit for having pointed the way.

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In 1958, Ed, with the assistance of his wife, Laura, explained why a backward area in southern Italy was poor. The reason was not government neglect or poor education but culture. In this area of Italy, the Banfields said in *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, people would not co-operate outside the boundaries of their immediate families. These “amoral familists” were the product of a high death rate, a defective system for owning land, and the absence of any extended families. By contrast, in a town of about the same size located in an equally forbidding part of southern Utah, they scarcely did anything else.

Foreign aid programs ignored this finding and went about persuading other nations to accept large grants to build new projects. Few of these projects created sustained economic growth. Where growth did occur, as in Singapore, Hong Kong, and South Korea, there was little foreign aid and what existed made little difference.

Today, David S. Landes, in his magisterial book that explains why some nations become wealthy while others remain poor, offers a one-word explanation: culture. He is right, but the Banfield book written forty years earlier is not mentioned.

In 1970, Ed published his best known and most controversial work, *The Unheavenly City*. In it he argued that the “urban crisis” was misunderstood. Many aspects of the so-called crisis, such as congestion or the business flight to the suburbs, are not really problems at all; some that are modest problems, such as transportation, could be managed rather well by putting high-peak hour tolls on key roads and staggering working hours; and many of the greatest

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problems, such as crime, poverty, and racial injustice, are things that we shall find it exceptionally difficult to manage.

Consider racial injustice. Racism is quite real, though much diminished in recent years, and it has a powerful effect. But the central problem for black Americans is not racism but poverty. And poverty is in part the result of where blacks live and what opportunities confront them. When they live in areas with many unskilled workers and few jobs for unskilled workers, they will suffer. When they grow up in families that do not own small businesses, they will find it harder to move into jobs available to them or to meet people who can tell them about jobs elsewhere. That whites treat blacks differently than they treat other whites is obviously true, but “much of what appears...as race prejudice is really *class* prejudice.”

In 1987, William Julius Wilson, a black scholar, published his widely acclaimed book, *The Truly Disadvantaged*. In it he says that, while racism remains a powerful force, it cannot explain the plight of inner city blacks. The problem is poverty—social class—and that poverty flows from the material conditions of black neighborhoods. Banfield’s book is mentioned in Wilson’s bibliography, but his argument is mentioned only in passing.

Both Wilson and Banfield explain the core urban problems as ones that flow from social class. To Wilson, an “underclass” has emerged, made of up people who lack skills, experience long term employment, engage in street crime, and are part of families with prolonged welfare dependency. Banfield would have agreed. But to Wilson, the

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underclass suffers from a shortage of jobs and available fathers, while for Banfield it suffers from a defective culture.

Wilson argued that changing the economic condition of underclass blacks would change their underclass culture. Banfield argued that unless the underclass culture was first changed (and he doubted much could be done in that regard), the economic condition of poor blacks would not improve. The central urban problem of modern America is to discover which theory is correct.

Banfield had some ideas to help address the culture (though he thought no government would adopt them): Keep the unemployment rate low, repeal minimum-wage laws, lower the school-leaving age, provide a negative income tax (that is, a cash benefit) to the “competent poor,” and pay problem families to send their children to decent day-care programs.

The Unheavenly City sold well but was bitterly attacked by academics and book reviewers; Wilson’s book was widely praised by the same critics. But on the central facts, both books say the same thing, and on the unknown facts—What will work?—neither book can (of necessity) offer much evidence.

Ed Banfield’s work would probably have benefited from a quality he was incapable of supplying. If it had been written in the dreary style of modern sociology or, worse, if he had produced articles filled with game-theoretic models and endless regression equations, he might have been taken more seriously. But Ed was a journalist before he was a scholar, and his commitment to clear, forceful writing was unshakable.

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He was more than a clear writer with a Ph.D.; everything he wrote was embedded in a powerful theoretical overview of the subject. “Theory,” to him, meant clarifying how people can think about a difficulty, and the theories he produced—on social planning, political influence, economic backwardness, and urban problems— are short masterpieces of incisive prose.

His remarkable mind was deeply rooted in Western philosophy as well as social science. To read his books is to be carried along by extraordinary prose in which you learn about David Hume and John Stuart Mill as well as about pressing human issues. To him, the central human problem was cooperation: How can society induce people to work together in informal groups—Edmund Burke’s “little platoons”—to manage their common problems? No one has ever thought through this issue more lucidly, and hence no one I can think of has done more to illuminate the human condition of the modern world.

A few months ago, a group of Ed’s former students and colleagues met for two days to discuss his work. Our fondness for this amusing and gregarious man was manifest, as were our memories of the tortures through which he put us as he taught us to think and write. Rereading his work as a whole reminds us that we had been privileged to know one of the best minds we had ever encountered, a person whose rigorous intellect and extraordinary knowledge created a standard to which all of us aspired but which none of us attained.

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Edward C. Banfield: An Appreciation

Edward C. Banfield, R.I.P.

Charles R. Kesler

One by one, the intellectual giants who helped shape American conservatism in the latter half of the 20th century are leaving us. With Edward C. Banfield's death a few weeks ago at 83, conservatism lost a profound student of American politics, one of the most influential social scientists of the age, and a discerning critic of liberal optimism and self-congratulation.

Banfield was a political scientist who insisted on asking large and unfashionable questions. His formative years were spent at the University of Chicago, where he had gone to study the politics and economics of planning with Rexford G. Tugwell, one of the New Deal's biggest brain-trusters. Banfield wanted to know why so many of the New Deal's agricultural experiments had failed. He found the answer not in the programs' implementation but in the planners' assumptions. They hadn't calculated the unintended consequences of their actions, the ripple effects of change in a complicated economic and political system, the inability of reason to dictate social reality. Ed developed these themes as a scholar and teacher at the University of Chicago, where he was a friend and colleague of Leo Strauss and Milton Friedman, and later at the University of Pennsylvania and Harvard.

His greatest book was one of his earliest, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, published in 1958. Researched and written with his wife, Laura, the book asked why a hilltown

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in Southern Italy, where Ed and his family had spent nine months living among and interviewing the inhabitants, was so poor. It wasn't because of class structure, as Marx would have insisted, nor because of the lack of national economic planning, as the New Dealers and contemporary development economists would have claimed. Ed argued, instead, that the region's poverty had a "moral basis." He showed that at the root of their squalor was the inhabitants' refusal to trust, and hence to cooperate, with anyone who was not a member of their immediate family.

This "amoral familism," as Ed called it, doomed the people to economic backwardness and political irrelevance. Unless this culture could be changed (and Banfield did not think it could, except slowly and over time), no amount of economic planning, income redistribution, or moral exhortation would turn these fatalistic villagers into eager citizens and entrepreneurs.

Banfield thus raised a classic question—why does anyone ever trust anyone outside the immediate family? or to put it differently, what makes civil society possible?—in a new and powerful way. Confirming insights by Hobbes, Tocqueville, and Fustel de Coulanges, Banfield uncovered the non-rational, habitual, and cultural roots of human association, proving again how "brain-trusters" trust the human brain too much.

Banfield's account of the primacy of culture and, in particular, of the culture of trust has been echoed by recent writers on "social capital," usually without attribution. But Ed's brilliant study may yet receive its due. Samuel Huntington, the prominent political scientist, recently

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praised *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* as “a work for the ages.”

Advanced societies have a moral basis, too, of course, and most of Ed’s books were about American society and its characteristic problems. Probably his greatest book on America was *The Unheavenly City*, which in 1970 became a controversial best-seller. As the title suggested, Ed’s thesis was that every human city is imperfect, and that the worst threats to urban decency and happiness come precisely from “enlightened” efforts to build heaven on earth. (Banfield had studied Mayor Daley’s Chicago and other urban “machines” and had favorable things to say about them, particularly in contrast to the schemes of goo-goos and other professional reformers.)

Yet far from being bleak, *The Unheavenly City* acknowledged that in many ways the quality of life in American cities had improved over the past hundred years, and even proposed (unusual for Ed) some reforms that would improve matters further. But his critics noticed only his devastating attacks on Great Society programs. Unable to refute him, they settled for impugning him viciously in all manner of settings, including his own classroom. *The Unheavenly City* has stood the test of time, however, and many of its conclusions are now accepted even by liberal writers on race, crime, and welfare who lament the existence of an urban “underclass.” But Banfield saw it first, describing the “lower-class culture” whose members were so “present-oriented” that they lived mainly for immediate gratification and impulsive adventure. The result, not easily

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changed, was an urban landscape littered with drug use, fatherless families, and random crime.

Ed was a luminous opponent of modern rationalism who didn't expect to be loved by its votaries, and wasn't. What better way for them to confirm his rather dark view of human nature, after all? But he loved his wife and children and he loved his friends and students, almost all of whom remained close and would often visit Laura and him at their lovely 18th century farmhouse in Vermont, where they spent summers. It was there, where he was accustomed to being his most amiable, skeptical, and cantankerous self, that he passed away, surrounded by family and friends. To all and especially to Laura, his wife of 61 years, we offer our warmest condolences.

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Edward C. Banfield: An Appreciation

The Gift of a Great Teacher

Robert J. Samuelson

If you are lucky in life, you will have at least one great teacher. More than three decades ago, I had Ed Banfield, a political scientist who taught mainly at the University of Chicago and Harvard University. Ed's recent death at 83 saddened me (which was expected) and left me with a real sense of loss (which wasn't). Although we had stayed in touch, we were never intimate friends or intellectual soul-mates. The gap between us in intellectual candlepower was too great. But he had loomed large in my life, and I have been puzzling why his death has so affected me.

I think the answer—and the reason for writing about something so personal—goes to the heart of what it means to be a great teacher. By teacher, I am not referring primarily to classroom instructors, because learning in life occurs mainly outside of schools. I first encountered Ed in a lecture hall, but his greatness did not lie in giving good lectures (which he did). It lay instead in somewhere transmitting life-changing lessons. If I had not known him, I would be a different person. He helped me become who I am and, more important, who I want to be.

When you lose someone like that, there is a hole. It is a smaller hole than losing a parent, a child or close friend. But it is still a hole, because great teachers are so rare. I have, for example, worked for some very talented editors. A few have earned my lasting gratitude for improving my reporting or

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writing. But none has been a great teacher; none has changed my life.

What gave Ed this power was, first, his ideas. He made me see new things or old things in new ways. The political scientist James Q. Wilson—first Ed’s student, then his collaborator—has called Banfield “the most profound student of American politics in this century.” Although arguable, this is surely plausible.

Americans take democracy, freedom, and political stability for granted. Ed was more wary. These great things do not exist in isolation. They must somehow fuse into a political system that fulfills certain essential social functions: to protect the nation; to provide some continuity in government and policy; to maintain order and modulate society’s most passionate conflicts. The trouble, Ed believed, is that democracies have self-destructive tendencies and that, in modern America, these had intensified.

On the whole, he regretted the disappearance after World War II of a political system based on big-city machines (whose supporters were rewarded with patronage jobs and contracts) and on party “bosses” (who often dictated political candidates from city council to Congress and, often, the White House). It was not that he favored patronage, corruption, or bosses for their own sake. But in cities, they created popular support for government and gave it the power to accomplish things. And they emphasized material gain over ideological fervor.

Postwar suburbanization and party “reforms”—weakening bosses and machines—destroyed this system. Its replacement, Ed feared, was inferior. “Whereas the old

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system had promised personal rewards,” he wrote, “the new one promises social reform.” Politicians would now merchandise themselves by selling false solutions to exaggerated problems. “The politician, like the TV news commentator, must always have something to say even when nothing urgently needs to be said,” he wrote in 1970. By some years, this anticipated the term “talking head.” People would lose respect for government because many “solutions” would fail. Here, too, he anticipated. Later, polls showed dropping public confidence in national leaders. Ed was not surprised.

He taught that you had to understand the world as it is, not as you wished it to be. This was sound advice for an aspiring reporter. And Ed practiced it. In 1954 and 1955, he and his wife, Laura (they would ultimately be married 61 years), spent time in a poor Italian village to explain its poverty. The resulting book—*The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*—remains a classic. Families in the village, it argued, so distrusted each other that they could not cooperate to promote common prosperity. The larger point (still missed by many economists) is that local culture, not just “markets,” determines economic growth.

What brought Ed fleeting prominence—notoriety, really—was *The Unheavenly City*. Published in 1970, it foretold the failure of the War on Poverty. Prosperity, government programs, and less racial discrimination might lift some from poverty, he said. But the worst problems of poverty and the cities would remain. They resulted from a “lower class” whose members were so impulsive and “present oriented” that they attached “no value to work, sacrifice, self-

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improvement, or service to family, friends, or community.” They dropped out of school, had illegitimate children, and were unemployed. Government couldn’t easily alter their behavior.

For this message, Ed was reviled as a reactionary. He repeatedly said that most black Americans didn’t belong to the “lower class” and that it contained many whites. Still, many dismissed him as a racist. Over time his theories gained some respectability from the weight of experience. Poverty defied government assaults; his “lower class” was relabeled “the underclass.” But when he wrote, Ed was assailing prevailing opinion. He knew he would be harshly, even viciously attacked. He wrote anyway and endured the consequences.

This was the deeper and more important lesson. Perhaps all great teachers—whether parents, bosses, professors or whoever—ultimately convey some moral code. Ed surely did. What he was saying in the 1960’s was not what everyone else was saying. I felt uneasy with the reigning orthodoxy. Ed helped me understand my doubts and made me feel that it was important to give them expression. The truth had to be pursued, no matter how inconvenient, unpopular, unfashionable or discomfoting. Ed did not teach that; he lived it. This was his code, and it was—for anyone willing to receive it—an immeasurable gift.

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Memorial Service

MEMORIAL SERVICE

Memorial Church, Harvard University

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Martin Meyerson

Chaucer, in his *Canterbury Tales*, wrote of the young Oxonian that “gladly woulde he learne and gladly teach.” Those two characteristics define the maturing Edward Banfield.

Ed was raised on a farm in Bloomfield, Connecticut, and attended the institution which became the University of Connecticut, where he edited the student paper. After short stints as a newspaper man and as secretary of the New Hampshire Farm Bureau, he worked for the U.S. Farm Security Administration. It was there that he met Rexford Guy Tugwell, one of FDR’s principal brain trusters, who was leaving the governorship of Puerto Rico to be professor and a program head at the University of Chicago. Tugwell invited Ed to be a graduate student and an instructor at that university. A bit earlier, I was recruited to Chicago by David Riesman to teach in its College, and also join Tugwell’s faculty group. That time was the start of the friendship of our two families which has extended for over fifty years, and of Ed’s and my collaborations and the sharing of varied activities.

Ed, new to the academic world when he arrived in Chicago, took to it most enthusiastically. Determined to

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learn, he read voraciously—Burke, Mill, Hume, de Tocqueville, Machiavelli, Adam Smith, the *Federalist Papers*, works of history and biography and political economy across the centuries and across the Atlantic. His affection for the written word and for the knowledge and ideas he encountered in books and papers lasted throughout his years. And he promptly became devoted to his teaching and his writing.

Ed's first book, *Government Project*, which went to press in 1950, is about a federal farm program which did not succeed. He was becoming a lapsed New Dealer, just as he perceived himself to be a lapsed Unitarian. It was then that I first encouraged Ed to shift his focus to urban life and policies. Our book, *Politics, Planning, and the Public Interest*, resulted.

On a trip to the American West by our two families—Margy and I, Laura and Ed and their two young children, Elliot and Laura—a special aim was to visit sites in Mormon Utah. The sense of enterprise in Mormon life appealed to Ed. For example, Brigham Young, in his first sermon in Utah, proclaimed that it was not sufficient to have faith in Zion; it was also important to have a deedhold in Zion. Ed later discarded his long manuscript on Mormon culture, but in his last days wondered if we could somehow retrieve it.

In the late 1950s, when the M.I.T.-Harvard Joint Center for Urban Studies was formed, we were eager to appoint a new colleague in urban government. In writing the case about Ed, the most telling point I made was that he attracted the ablest and most imaginative students in Chicago's political science department. That magnetism of his persisted

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at Harvard, where he soon became the Shattuck professor and a member of the Joint Center; and in his few years at Pennsylvania, where he was Kenan professor.

Ed's range continued to broaden throughout his life. In an American Enterprise Institute lecture and monograph, he contrasted American governmental policies and practices with Canada's. American had and has an effective, ramshackle pattern of go-getters, and our government manages to accommodate the conflicts arising in a competitive society. When the Toronto area was converted into a metropolitan municipality, that was accomplished instead by central authorities, as would be the case in Britain or Continental Europe.

Ed's work extended to the conservative aspects of de Tocqueville, to government's role in the visual arts, to the marketplace and social choices. His orientation to the social, political, and economic issues facing urban America are documented in his monumental study, *The Unheavenly City*. Reviled originally, its concern for a dispossessed class in America has become increasingly recognized in the literature of social reform.

His most significant work is probably *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, written with the help of his wife. It deal with the *Schadenfreude* of a southern Italian community, in which satisfaction is derived from the misfortunes of neighbors and others, and cooperation therefore unlikely.

Ed disliked large events such as cocktail parties, and rarely liked faculty meetings. He was bemused that I would be willing to be president of large universities.

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He most often went against the grain of conventional wisdom—or whatever pretended to be conventional wisdom. He was always concerned about those who he believed were deprived in various ways. He aided the careers of many, some of whom are here today. Though modest, it pleased his fancy to be at the White House in a private discussion with President Nixon. (He chaired one of Nixon's task forces.)

We admire Ed's intellectual keenness and his satiric wit and his sense of humor. Other aspects of his temperament included his love of beauty, especially the beauty of nature and gardens. He was rooted in the earth, and had the urge to grow flowers and trees and vegetables. He had a particular craving for their farm in Vermont, where he was superbly happy. Some of his pleasures were sedentary; in addition to the greats of literature and scholarship, his readings included mystery novels. He liked hikes.

He enjoyed great food, especially his wife's inspired cooking, and fine wines—all the more if consumed with friends and students. And Ed was sentimental. The Banfields' generosity was one-on-one and imaginative. Ed treated responsive students like members of the family, and his children and grandchildren like favorite students. He loved them all, and particularly, of course, Laura, his wife and partner for 61 years.

This past summer, I said again to Ed that he reminded me of Lincoln. He had the lanky build of Lincoln. He had a similar kind of deadpan humor, he had that crisp and brilliant rhetoric, and like Lincoln, that devotion to America's evolving democratic traditions.

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Ed has been the teacher of us all. A great void has been left, but love remains, and wonderful memories.

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Harvey C. Mansfield

“This book will probably strike many readers as the work of an ill-tempered and mean-spirited fellow.” Thus runs the most famous sentence in Ed Banfield’s most famous book, *The Unheavenly City* (1970). He put it right at the beginning so that it could not be missed. He was right about the reaction of many readers, but if he thought he could disarm the criticism by anticipating it, he was wrong.

Of course Banfield was neither ill-tempered nor mean-spirited. He was gentle as a lamb, or so I always found him; we have it on good authority that he sometimes affected a certain gruffness. His writing, however, was neither gentle nor gruff. It was deliberately and relentlessly subversive of established pieties; it was full of impish conceits—a chapter in *The Unheavenly City* titled “Rioting Mainly for Fun and Profit,” for example. But though Banfield was impish, he was more serious than an imp (and he was never a wimp); his books were as close to satire as scholarly discourse permits, and they were meant to be offensive. Even that famous sentence was as provocative as it was disarming.

The type Banfield wished to provoke was the “reformer-moralizer,” as he termed it. Undoubtedly those conforming to the type were “liberals,” as we would say, but perhaps with a view to an earlier, more realistic liberalism that he admired, Banfield chose to present them as Puritans holding the belief that a heavenly city could be built on earth. In this

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he anticipated the disgust of a recent American president for what he beautifully called the “vision thing.”

Yet Banfield was in a more complicated position. He agreed that in our age at least, ideas are the chief cause of trouble in politics. They are used to conceal the self-interest that men wish to deny themselves, and they are expressed in schemes for reform that ignore the vital center of human nature. But Banfield, unlike the recent president, was a man of ideas. He lived with ideas every day, and, blessed with an old age free of senility, he lived with them to the end of his days. For the only true way of opposing bad ideas is with good ideas. A friend of his once said, “he is the non-thinkers’ thinker.”

Banfield’s ideas were tethered to fact, and he was ever the enemy of reformers’ utopias, particularly of the social planning beginning in the Progressive era that combined moralism with alleged social science expertise. He was a social scientist himself, not a philosopher; yet his books were sprinkled with insights drawn from philosophers who could lead him to fact. Banfield was no cynic. Attention to fact was his way of treating the outstanding problem he saw in contemporary politics, which was to distinguish morality from its angry little cousin, moralism.

To moralism, Banfield opposed not so much self-interest as culture. Some people were “future-oriented” but many others, forming the underclass, as we say euphemistically (Banfield said the “lower class”), were “present-oriented” and unable to take advantage of opportunities placed before them. But Banfield believe that culture was not so very far from nature, and some of the men he described as “present-

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oriented” could also be called stupid. In contrast to the viewpoint from which all humans respond intelligently to incentives, Banfield ventured to suggest restoring stupidity to human nature and thus to the analysis of human behavior by political science. He knew, however, that it was not always smart to be “future-oriented” like the middle class, always postponing one’s satisfactions. So he enjoyed life to the full with his dear wife Laura, his children, his friends, and his students.

Harvey C. Mansfield is the William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Government at Harvard University.

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Martha Derthick

I met Ed in the lobby of Littauer. I was in the company of a fellow graduate student, whom Ed evidently knew. Ed approached my companion to say that he was looking for someone to edit a series of city politics reports that he was putting together. They were arriving from their young authors in raw form. I needed money, and I thought I knew how to edit—so as Ed spoke I tugged at the sleeve of my companion, who was showing no interest in the job. After quite a lot of tugging, I secured an introduction to Ed. He then gave me an employment test—a few pages of manuscript to edit. After looking over what I had done, Ed announced that he and I were of the same school—we both believed that two words should never be used where one would do.

Ed admitted proteges into the Banfield school, which met at his dinner table in Cambridge or for longer and more memorable sessions at the farm in Vermont. With Laurie and Elliot, who were adolescents, we would get into whatever Oldsmobile was going at the time and take off for relaxed time in East Montpelier.

Except, of course, that Ed didn't relax, even in Vermont. He worked long and regular mornings at the typewriter. And lord knows no graduate student ever relaxed in his presence. In the afternoons he might do chores, drive around the countryside in search of antiques and used books, or take a walk before sitting down with a well-made martini, but his

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mind—which was highly original, profound, quick, restlessly, relentlessly, aggressively inquisitive, and acutely penetrating—never took a break. It made the Banfield dinner table more instructive than any classroom I ever sat in.

Let me digress for a moment to comment on the quality of that dinner table. It did not detract from the experience that Laura Banfield is one of the world's best cooks. What Laura could do with a mushroom fresh picked from the fields around the farm would put great chefs to shame, and no meal that she prepared was less than superb. In Vermont the garden of course contributed to the quality, but even in Cambridge the kitchen was distinctive. To this day, I do not eat a persimmon or a cannoli or escarole soup without thinking fondly of Ed and Laura Banfield.

The repartee was as good as the food, though it was one-sided, as it was hard to match the host and flatly impossible to trump him. Still, if one was intimidated, one was also powerfully and effectively instructed.

There is a world of difference, as this gathering well knows, between being able as a graduate student to write an acceptable seminar paper and being able to function as a producing scholar, with the ability to frame questions for research, test answers to the questions with evidence, and produce an extended and defensible argument.

No graduate school that I have ever seen is very good at getting students across that gap—but Ed was. Professionally, he helped me to make that leap, beginning with inspiring the desire to make it. He made academic inquiry exciting with

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the example of his own passion of it, and the rigor of his work set the standard to which one would aspire.

At the same time, the approach was not impossibly abstruse or technical. Granted at that time it was informed in his case by very wide reading in the social sciences—classics, mainly—Ed in the end did his work by thinking very hard, writing very clearly, and saying what he believed to be true. In principle, one could try to do that too.

Although I never took a course from Ed, I did serve as his grader. It may surprise some people here—who know of the high standards to which he held himself and his proteges, and who do not think of him as a man inclined to be ahead of his time—that Ed was an early practitioner of grade inflation. I struggled conscientiously over undergraduate bluebooks, and would occasionally solicit advice from him. He would scan the bluebook over and at the first hint of intelligence or comprehension say, “Give him an A.” The clue to this lies, I think, in the prefix of the term “undergraduate.” Ed was very kind, particularly to persons who did not enjoy elite status.

This kindness of course helps to explain his extraordinary impact as a teacher. He was drawn to—and he drew to himself—able young people. He drew them not to solicit their admiration or even their emulation, but to make them better at what they were trying to do. It can be said of many of us, as Bob Samuelson said so well in the *Washington Post*, that he didn’t just hone our skills. His influence was more profound, and constructive. A great teacher, Ed helped us to become the people we wanted to be.

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Charles R. Kesler

Walking across Harvard Yard in the fall of 1977, I asked Professor Banfield what *kind* of a conservative he was. He gave me a skeptical, slightly dyspeptic look and replied that he preferred not to think of himself as a conservative at all, but rather as a man of the eighteenth century. Well, I said to myself, you don't hear *that* everyday. By "a man of the eighteenth century," he did not mean Rousseau or Tom Paine, of course, but rather, as he went on to explain, those writers whose unblinking view of human nature he so admired—Adam Smith, David Hume, and John Adams, his favorite—with whose dour Yankee sentiments Ed had a proud affinity.

Ed Banfield was, in fact, a Connecticut Yankee, and he had little patience for romantic notions of King Arthur's court, or of anything else. Mark Twain's Yankee from Connecticut had made the mistake of trying to turn Camelot into another Bridgeport. Modern reformers and social planners had made the opposite mistake or trying to turn Bridgeport into Camelot. Ed was interested in why Camelot was Camelot and why Bridgeport remained Bridgeport. That is, he wanted to know why backward societies tended to remain backward and how advanced societies could stay so advanced, especially given the many ingenious and well-meaning ways to spoil that achievement. Ed was always in pursuit of the powerful forces behind the "is" of any society. His question was not "How can we change the world?" but

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“How should we understand it?” Reality was not optional, he thought, not even for social scientists.

Yet by understanding the moral basis of political and economic development and the cultural basis of American urban problems, Ed did, so to speak, change the world. His theories have affected the scholarly and even, to some degree, the popular understanding of the nature of crime, welfare, poverty, and other issues. The greatest and most profound change he wrought, however, was on his students. One of them, otherwise unknown to me, sent me, out of the blue, this reminiscence of Ed. This student [E.A. Costa] wrote:

[Banfield’s] undergraduate course at Harvard was nicknamed ‘Trashcans,’ and he was often openly derided...in the early 1960’s...by student and faculty ideologues. Entering the course with an open mind, however, I—and many of my fellow students—were privileged to learn from a true social scientist at work. Clear-headed, unclouded by ideology, and pushing full speed ahead into a thousand uncharted seas, he was an unflagging and percipient guide to how things really work—how the minimum wage causes unemployment...the cultural roots of poverty, and so forth. Every lecture was an illumination.

Just so. But it wasn’t merely the lectures and the books that molded his students. It was Ed. His gift for friendship, his sharp sense of humor, the high standards that he set for himself (and for everyone else), his unrivalled cantanker-

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ousness—these shaped us all. I don't know whether Ed every fully appreciated the effect he had on his students. Like the eighteenth century thinkers whom he admired, he found it easier to understand the world, perhaps, than to understand himself. The happiness he found in life—and that he undoubtedly brought to those around him—he attributed mainly to unmerited good fortune. This was the Puritan subsoil of this Yankee farmer. The happiest of all the happy accidents in his life, Ed would confess occasionally, was meeting his wife Laura, though their 61-year marriage and the character of their life together was, I am sure, no accident.

When we reached Mather house, our destination on that fall day 22 years ago, I, then a college senior, introduced Ed to the small conservative cell he'd agreed to address. I must have used the c-word in describing him, because I distinctly remember him saying, in mild exasperation, that I must not have heard or hadn't understood what he'd been explaining as we'd walked down from Littauer. I replied that I had heard him, but that I didn't quite believe what I'd heard. If being a man of the eighteenth century isn't being conservative, what is? He answered, let's just say I'm no more a conservative than John Adams was.

Exactly. Ed was an inquirer after truth, who in his discussion of Adam Smith that evening, made all the usual political concerns seem staid and flat. He impressed me then, and ever after, with the energy and range of his mind. He was, I remember thinking, what you'd imagined a Harvard professor to be like, before you'd actually met very many of them and been disappointed.

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Ed never disappointed, and I consider myself fortunate to have counted him, for more than two decades, a teacher and friend.

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James Q. Wilson

Ed was the ultimate scholar, with a mind so enriched by his learning and so precise in its operation that he made others appear narrow and vague. To paraphrase Casey Stengel, getting a fuzzy thought past Ed was like throwing a lamb chop past a wolf. He was a journalist before he was a scholar, and so he became a skilled writer before he was a professional thinker. He demanded clarity from everyone, but especially from himself. He endlessly revised his manuscripts to make them lucid, and in so doing made them beautiful.

Wherever Ed sat, a seminar began. He would ask a question and weigh the answer that would appear. Why do people vote? Do not answer, “to influence an election,” for that, he would point out, was surely wrong. Why do people riot? Be careful about saying, “to express a grievance,” because then he would ask you what evidence you had. Usually you had very little. His deepest question, one to which he always returned, was to ask why people cooperate. The easy answer—to gain something of mutual advantage—might appear correct, but it could not explain why cooperation did not appear even when there was much to be gained.

He and his wife, Laura, studied this in southern Italy and in Mormon Utah. His explanation of why the people of Montegrano did not cooperate was a masterpiece; his explanation of why the Mormons did cooperate would also

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have been a masterpiece, but he was never satisfied that his manuscript was good enough, and so it was never published.

How I wish other scholars had his forbearance. Their books would be reduced by 90 percent. Ed once suggested that foundations adopt the policy of the United States Department of Agriculture; when a scholar applies for a grant to write a book, give it to him only on condition that the book never be published.

Ed was a teacher, not a trainer. He understood that intellectuals have opinions about everything and take responsibility for nothing. If anyone sought him out to learn how to be a bureaucrat, a politician, or a policy analyst, he would tell them they were wasting their time. What an executive does requires judgment, the one thing that cannot be found on a campus.

Ed cared little for public esteem. When he was sent a questionnaire that would be the basis of his entry into *Who's Who*, he not only threw it away but wrote to the publisher saying that if they used his name without permission he would sue them. When the American Political Science Association voted to make him their vice president, he discovered that he would have to join the organization to hold that office. He joined, for one year.

If he had been preoccupied with fame, he never would have written *The Unheavenly City*. It was bitterly attacked in some quarters for being reactionary, possibly racist. The truth, of course, is just the opposite. Ed argued that the central social problem of cities reflected differences in class, not race; that class in large measure depended on culture; and that culture changes slowly. He was ahead of his time.

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Within a few years, thoughtful people were writing about a newly labeled underclass and lamenting how slowly it changed despite a rapidly expanding economy and a sharp decline in race prejudice.

But as some writers became thoughtful, others became destructive. Social activists tried to change our world by appealing to the very categories that Ed had exploded. Change must come, they said, from empowering groups based on their racial or ethnic identity, and so they began the great splitting apart of American life designed, it would seem, to undercut the central principle of American democracy—that it can make one people out of many.

Ed loved America because it had succeeded where so many other political efforts had failed. To Ed, the long legacy of history was the ultimate test of human wisdom. If we make something that works, we are foolish to change it. In one of his masterful essays on American politics, he wrote this:

A political system is an accident. It is an accumulation of habits, customs, prejudices, and principles that have survived a long process of trial and error and of ceaseless response to changing circumstances. If the system works on the whole, it is a lucky accident—the luckiest, indeed, that can befall society, for all of the institutions of the society, and thus its entire character and that of the human types formed within it, depend ultimately on the government and the political order.

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Those who did not know Ed might suppose that his vast wisdom and scholarly rigor would have made him an aloof and unapproachable man. Not at all. He hated to eat alone, he loved company, he played with children, he drank martinis, and he shamelessly indulged his dogs. He loved jokes of all kinds; as Leo Strauss would have said, some off-color, some on-color.

Ed's character is beautifully captured in the speech made about Cardinal Wolsey in Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*: "He was a scholar, and a ripe and good one, exceeding wise, faire-spoken, and persuading; lofty and sour to them that loved him not, but to those men that sought him, sweet as summer."



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