

Edward C. Banfield, *The Unheavenly City Revisited*
(Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974)

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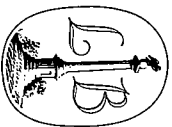
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THE UNHEAVENLY CITY REVISITED

THE UNHEAVENLY CITY REVISITED

by EDWARD C. BANFIELD

A Revision of *The Unheavenly City*



LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY • BOSTON • TORONTO

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FIRST PRINTING

PUBLISHERS NOTE

Ever since its publication in 1970, Edward C. Banfield's *The Unheavenly City* has provoked intense discussion among students, scholars, and general readers alike. And today, some twenty-two printings later, it remains one of the most widely read and widely debated of all books on contemporary American urban problems. *The Unheavenly City Revisited* constitutes a thorough revision and substantial expansion of the original text of *The Unheavenly City*. Although the author's main theses and the order and structure of the chapters in both volumes remain the same, *The Unheavenly City Revisited* unquestionably supplants the earlier volume and will, we trust, bring Mr. Banfield's work to the attention of many new readers, as well as provide significant new information for those already familiar with the book in its original version.

The title *The Unheavenly City Revisited* is intended to distinguish the present book from its original version and to prevent any possibility of confusion between the two.

Chapter 9, "Rioting Mainly for Fun and Profit," appeared originally in somewhat different form in *The Metropolitan Enigma*, published by Harvard University Press, 1968.

Part of Chapter 11, "Why Government Cannot Solve the Urban Problem," appeared originally in different form in *Daedalus*, Fall, 1968, and is reprinted by permission of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Copyright © 1968 by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Published simultaneously in Canada by Little, Brown & Company (Canada) Limited

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

APR 3 1974

Hot/3 6 May 74

9/2/74

Come hither, and I will show you, an admirable Spectacle! 'Tis an Heavenly CITY. . . . A CITY to be inhabited by an Innumerable Company of Angels, and by the Spirits of Just Men
Put on thy beautiful Garments,
O America, the Holy City!
— Cotton Mather, *Theopolis Americana: An Essay on the Golden Street of the Holy City* (1710)

Preface to *The Unheavenly City Revisited*

This book has given rise to a great deal of controversy in the four years since it appeared. Moreover, the problems of the cities have changed. These are the two principal reasons for this "revisit."

I have taken very seriously the many criticisms, not all of them unsympathetic to my point of view, by reviewers and by colleagues and many readers who were kind enough to write me (review articles are listed in the appendix). On some points of importance I have modified, or completely changed, my views. In a great many places I have recognized, and I hope eliminated, ambiguities of language or confusions of thought that created confusion (and often outrage), and diverted readers from the ideas that I was trying to convey.

Some of the changes I have made so that my meaning will be clear on matters of very great importance. The best example is my discussion of the lower-class (radically present-oriented) style of life. By treating the lower-class culture in Chapter Three and waiting until Chapter Ten to acknowledge that the same pattern of behavior may result from situational causes (hopeless poverty, for example), I made it unnecessarily difficult for many readers to either understand or accept what I was saying. The present version will I hope much reduce this difficulty.

I had hoped that by this time I would be able to present data supporting my view that the cultural differences among the several social classes can be explained by differences of time horizon. This view was advanced as an heuristic hypothesis, but it was taken by many readers as an assertion of fact. I had hoped too that I could give some reasonably reliable estimates of the sizes of the classes as I define them. Unfortunately neither is yet possible; so far as I have been able to discover, appropriate data do not exist.

Although I have worked hardest on clarifying my argument, I have also taken account of some recent developments that seem to be significant — for example, changes in the growth and distribution of population, in the unemployment problem, and in our knowledge about the effects of compensatory education, public health, and other policy areas. On the whole, however, I have found that the wealth of data that have become available since the book was written (the 200,000 pages of the 1970 Census are the most important source) has confirmed, or at any rate supported, the main elements of my earlier analysis.

Because the book has proved to be so controversial and because it is being used in a wide variety of college courses, I have cited many more authorities, and a much wider range of them, than I did before. I make no pretense of "covering" the literature, however, because this is not intended to be that kind of book and because I take up so many matters in it. This is an *essay* — as I said in the preface to the original version, "an attempt by a social scientist to think about the problems of the city in the light of scholarly findings."

It was never my purpose to write a "how-to-do-it" book for the solution of urban problems. One of my main contentions is that we do not know and never can know what the real nature of the problem is, let alone what might "work" to alleviate or solve it. Therefore I was — and am — precluded from making short-run forecasts or from prescribing cures. The "recommendations" in the next-to-the-last chapter were intended, as some discerning readers recognized, merely as a take-off point for a discussion of the political circumstances that make such recommendations pointless. To bring my account of the city's development "up to date" by introducing data on the "trends" of the last two or three years — such as the apparent decline in heroin use and the apparent drop in some kinds of crime — would be a very dubious enterprise. It takes more than a few years to make a "trend." Witness the "crisis of youth unrest" that superseded the "urban crisis" three or four months after this book was first published and, within a year or two, disappeared, to be followed by other "crises" in rapid succession. If my essential argument about the economic, cultural, and political processes of American city growth is to be either confirmed or disconfirmed, it will have to be not three or four but twenty or thirty years hence.

For much the same reasons, I cannot find a way to make the book much less controversial. Clarifying myself will, I trust, reduce the amount of outcry over views erroneously attributed to me, although experience tells me that I should not expect too much in this respect. It would have been impossible to be more explicit in saying that the lower class, as I defined it, was not to be equated either with the poor or the black, but this did not deter many people from insisting that I meant the opposite of what I wrote.

The principal — and I am afraid ineradicable — source of controversy, however, is that my main points are deeply subversive of opinions and beliefs to which many highly intelligent and well-informed people are wedded, and without which the world would perhaps be unendurable for them. What most distresses my critics is not that I have (as they suppose) made conjectures that are not in accord with the facts. Rather it is, first, that I have asserted (and anyone who reflects knows it to be true) that conjectures unsupported, or slightly supported, by facts are the stuff of which social policies must always mainly be made. And, second, *my* conjecture is that owing to the nature of man and society (more particularly, American culture and institutions) we cannot "solve" our serious problems by rational management. Indeed, by trying we are almost certain to make matters worse.

My "revisit" has therefore not changed the book in any essentials, and I am afraid that, although it should be less irritating, those who did not like it before will not like it now.

I wish to express my thanks and appreciation to Professors Frank F. Furstenburg of the University of Pennsylvania and Shigeo Nohara of the University of Delaware for their advice and criticism. I am particularly indebted to my old friend Julius Margolis for his painstaking before-and-after review of the manuscript and to the Fels Center of Government of which he is director for affording me ideal conditions in which to work. Mrs. Rachel Munafó and Mrs. Lenore Siber gave indispensable assistance as research assistant and secretary-typist respectively. I should like also to acknowledge the help given by Miss Nancy Smith, librarian at the Fels Center, and Dr. David I. Lazar.

Preface to *The Unheavenly City*

This book will probably strike many readers as the work of an ill-tempered and mean-spirited fellow. I would not mind that especially if I did not think that it might prevent them from taking its argument as seriously as they should. I should like therefore to assure the reader that I am as well-meaning — probably even as soft-hearted — as he. But facts are facts, however unpleasant, and they have to be faced unblinkingly by anyone who really wants to improve matters in the cities.

It is, of course, impossible to be an expert on urban affairs — the range of subject matter is far too great. One can, however, learn enough of several disciplines to make useful applications of some of their major ideas and findings. This is what I have tried to do. Although I draw on work in economics, sociology, political science, psychology, history, planning, and other fields, this book is not really a work of social science. Rather, it is an attempt by a social scientist to think about the problems of the cities in the light of scholarly findings. If the attempt is thought presumptuous, I offer two defenses. First, the alternative — to discuss the problems of the city in the light of a single discipline — is clearly worse; better to be presumptuous than wrong. Second, one need not have a profound knowledge of any discipline in order to make the use of it that I am making, provided that one receives criticism from those who are specialists.

Fortunately, I have had a great deal of such criticism. Much came from Harvard students, undergraduates as well as graduates, some of whom had detailed and often firsthand knowledge of matters about which I knew little. In addition, I have to thank the following for reading particular chapters: Gary Becker, James S. Coleman, M. Kimbrough Marshall, Christopher De Muth, John F. Kain, Bruce

Kovner, Garth Mangum, Gary T. Marx, Thomas A. Reppetto, David Riesman, Martin Shefter, and Lester C. Thurow. The entire, or almost entire, manuscript was read by Martin Meyerson, Margy Eilin Meyerson, Milton Friedman, Frances Fox Piven, and James O. Wilson. Margaret Locke and Mark Petri provided research assistance in the early stages of the work. Lawrence D. Brown, who prepared the manuscript for the press, called attention to and helped eliminate numerous confusions of thought; if it were not for him the book would be in many respects poorer. Mrs. Carla Kirmani was a painstaking typist. I am very grateful to them all. I am grateful also to the Joint Center for Urban Studies of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University, which supported the undertaking generously over a considerable period.

Although written for this book, Chapter Nine appeared first in James O. Wilson, ed., *The Metropolitan Enigma* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968). Chapter Eleven is a much-revised version of an article that appeared in the Fall, 1968, issue of *Daedalus*.

1970

E.C.B.

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THE
UNHEAVENLY
CITY
REVISITED

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

... the clock is ticking, time is moving . . . , we must ask ourselves every night when we go home, are we doing all that we should do in our nation's capital, in all the other big cities of the country.

—President Johnson, after the Watts Riot,
August 1965

A few years ago we constantly heard that urban America was on the brink of collapse. It was one minute to midnight, we were told . . . Today, America is no longer coming apart . . . The hour of crisis is passed.

—President Nixon, March 1973

THE reason for juxtaposing the quotations above is not to suggest that whereas a few years ago the cities were in great peril now all is well with them. Rather it is to call attention both to the simplistic nature of all such sweeping judgments and to the fact that one's perception of urban America is a function of time and place and also, if one is a politician, of whatever winds are blowing. A few blocks' walk through the heart of any large city was enough in 1965 — and is enough in 1973 — to show much that was (and is) in crying need of improvement. That a society so technologically advanced and prosperous has many hundreds of blocks ranging from dreary to dismal is disturbing at least and when one takes into account that by the end of the century the urban population will be at least 20 percent larger than in 1970, with six out of every ten persons living in a metropolitan area of more than a million, the prospect may appear alarming. There is, however, another side to the matter. The plain fact is that the overwhelming majority of city dwellers live more comfortably and

conveniently than ever before. They have more and better housing, more and better schools, more and better transportation, and so on. By any conceivable measure of material welfare the present generation of urban Americans is, on the whole, better off than any other large group of people has ever been anywhere. What is more, there is every reason to expect that the general level of comfort and convenience will continue to rise at an even more rapid rate through the foreseeable future.

It is true that many people do not share, or do not share fully, this general prosperity, some because they are the victims of racial prejudice and others for other reasons that are equally beyond their control. If the chorus of complaint about the city arose mainly from these disadvantaged people or on behalf of them, it would be entirely understandable, especially if their numbers were increasing and their plight were getting worse. But the fact is that until very recently most of the talk about the urban crisis has had to do with the comfort, convenience, and business advantage of the well-off white majority and not with the more serious problems of the poor, the Negro, and others who stand outside the charmed circle. And the fact also is that the number of those standing outside the circle is decreasing, as is the relative disadvantage that they suffer. There is still much poverty and much racial discrimination. But there is less of both than ever before.

The question arises, therefore, not of whether we are faced with an urban crisis, but rather, *in what sense* we are faced with one. Whose interest and what interests are involved? How deeply? What should be done? Given the political and other realities of the situation, what *can* be done?

The first need is to clear away some semantic confusions. Consider the statement, so frequently used to alarm luncheon groups, that more than 70 percent of the population now lives in urban places and that this number may increase to nearly 90 percent in the next two decades if present trends continue. Such figures give the impression of standing room only in the city, but what exactly do they mean?

When we are told that the population of the United States is rapidly becoming overwhelmingly urban, we probably suppose this to mean that most people are coming to live in the big cities. This is true in one

sense but false in another. It is true that most people live closer physically and psychologically to a big city than ever before; rural occupations and a rural style of life are no longer widespread. On the other hand, the percentage of the population living in cities of 250,000 or more (there are only fifty-six of them) is about the same now as it was in 1920. In Census terminology an "urban place" is any settlement having a population of 2,500 or more; obviously places of 2,500 are not what we have in mind when we use words like "urban" and "city."¹ It is somewhat misleading to say that the country is becoming more urban, when what is meant is that more people are living in places like White River Junction, Vermont (pop. 6,311), and living in places like Boston, Massachusetts (pop. 641,000). But it is fewer in places like Boston, Massachusetts (pop. 641,000). But it is not *altogether* misleading, for most of the small urban places are now close enough (in terms of time and other costs of travel) to large cities to be part of a metropolitan complex. White River Junction, for example, is now very much influenced by Boston. The average population density in all "urban areas," however, has been decreasing: from 5,408 per square mile in 1950 to 3,752 in 1960, to 3,376 in 1970.

A great many so-called urban problems are really conditions that we either cannot eliminate or do not want to incur the disadvantages of eliminating. Consider the "problem of congestion." The presence of a great many people in one place is a cause of inconvenience, to say the least. But the advantages of having so many people in one place far outweigh these inconveniences, and we cannot possibly have the advantages without the disadvantages. To "eliminate congestion" in the city must mean eliminating the city's reason for being. Congestion in the city is a "problem" only in the sense that congestion in Times Square on New Year's Eve is one; in fact, of course, people come to the city, just as they do to Times Square, precisely *because* it is congested. If it were not congested, it would not be worth coming to.

Strictly speaking, a problem exists only as we should want something different from what we do want or as by better management we could get a larger total of what we want. If we think it a good thing that many people have the satisfaction of driving their cars in and out of the city, and if we see no way of arranging the situation to get them

