THE SPATIAL RANGE OF "SOCIAL JUSTICE"

There can be little doubt that the moral feelings which express themselves in the demand for "social justice" derive from an attitude which in more primitive conditions the individual developed towards the fellow members of the small group to which he belonged. Towards the personally known member of one's own group, it may well have been a recognized duty to assist him and to adjust one's actions to his needs. This is made possible by the knowledge of his person and his circumstances. The situation is wholly different in the Great or Open Society. Here the products and the services of each benefit mostly persons he does not know. The greater productivity of such a society rests on a division of labor extending far beyond the range any one person can survey. This extension of the process of exchange beyond relatively small groups, and including large numbers of persons not known to each other, has been made possible by conceding to the stranger and even the foreigner the same protection of rules of just conduct which apply to the relations to the known members of one's own small group.

This application of the same rules of just conduct to the relations to all other men is rightly regarded as one of the great achievements of a liberal society. What is usually not understood is that this extension of the same rules to the relations to all other men (beyond the most intimate group such as the family and personal friends) requires an attenuation at least of some of the rules which are enforced in the relations to other members of the smaller group. If the legal duties towards strangers or foreigners are to be the same as those towards the neighbours or inhabitants of the same village or town, the latter duties will have to be reduced to such as can also be applied to the stranger. No doubt men will always wish to belong also to smaller groups and be willing voluntarily to assume greater obligations towards self-chosen friends or companions. But such moral obligations towards some can never become enforced duties in a system of freedom under the law, because in such a system the selection of those towards whom a man wishes to assume special moral obligations must be left to him and cannot be determined by law. A system of rules intended for an Open Society and, at least in principle, meant to be applicable to all others, must have a somewhat smaller content than one to be applied in a small group....

INTRODUCTION TO
Edward Banfield,
The Unheavenly City Revisited

The period from the end of the Second World War through the oil shock of 1973 was an era of substantial economic growth for the capitalist economies of North America and western Europe. They were also years in which the welfare state, in its many national variants, expanded. In general, there was an attempt to provide greater social security through the extension of old age benefits and unemployment insurance, to provide more universal access to health care, and to increase vocational opportunity by expanding access to education. Another goal of the welfare state was the elimination of poverty. Among the most incisive conservative critics of this latter campaign was the American political scientist Edward Banfield. 

The expansion of the American welfare state known as the "the Great Society" began during the Kennedy Administration with the Omnibus Housing Act in 1961, which aimed at the elimination of slums through "urban renewal," and the Manpower Development and Training Act, which sought to train the unemployed for skilled labor. In 1963 the socialist intellectual Michael Harrington published The Other America. The book focused the attention of opinion makers on the extent of ongoing poverty amid an increasingly affluent society, and led to calls for government action to eliminate poverty. Government experts assigned by President Kennedy to come up with an anti-poverty program noted the limits of what was known about effectively combatting poverty, and recommended a series of small-scale demonstration projects. But after the assassination of Kennedy, the new president, Lyndon Johnson, seeking to make his political mark, demanded that his advisors come up with something that would be "big and bold and hit the whole nation with real impact." In his State of the Union message of January 1964, Johnson proclaimed that "this administration today, here and now, declares unconditional war on poverty in America."  

From 1964 through 1968, federal spending on the poor rose from twelve billion dollars per annum to twenty-seven billion. Programs were designed to create greater opportunities for children of the poor, especially those in black slums, on the theory that juvenile delinquency

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2 Ibid., p. 240.
was a rational response to the lack of opportunities in impoverished urban settings. In 1965 the government launched the Job Corps, which created residential centers to train inner city youth for the job market.³ A Community Action Program was funded with a mandate that its programs be “developed, conducted, and administered with maximum feasible participation of residents,” that is, by the poor themselves. The Office of Economic Opportunity was created with widely ramified powers. After the passage of major civil rights bills in 1964 and 1965, the civil rights movement turned from desegregating the American South to demanding jobs and greater economic equality for American blacks, increasing the pressure on government to eliminate urban poverty. When asked at a Senate hearing in 1966 how long he thought it would take to win the War on Poverty, the head of President Johnson’s anti-poverty program, Sargent Shriver, replied “About ten years.”¹

Attention to the urban poor was further heightened in August of 1966 when riots erupted in Watts, a poor black neighborhood in Los Angeles. The civil insurrection went on for five days, and was quelled with the aid of the National Guard. The next summer was more violent still, as 164 racial disturbances flared in cities across America and National Guard units occupied parts of eight major cities.⁴ The problems of America’s cities, it was widely claimed, were getting worse instead of better.

Edward Banfield was a distinguished political scientist at Harvard University when he published The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis in 1970. Before coming to Harvard he had studied and taught at the University of Chicago, and he shared the skepticism of his Chicago colleague Milton Friedman regarding governmental intervention in social and economic processes. Banfield had written and edited half a dozen books on American urban politics and the problems of big cities, and had chaired a pre-inauguration Task Force on Urban Affairs for President-elect Richard M. Nixon in 1968–1969. He combined empirical social scientific analysis with a deeply conservative sensibility.

Both American liberals and conservatives in the 1960s embraced the notion of a “culture of poverty,” a phrase coined by the anthropologist Oscar Lewis. To liberals, the concept suggested that the culture of the poor, which limited their upward social mobility, could be transformed by government agencies such as schools, enrichment programs for preschool children, and job training programs. In The Unheavenly City, Banfield too focused on the cultural determinants of class, but he was far more pessimistic about the plausibility of the suggested remedies. His book called attention to the significance of lower-class culture in explaining the persistence of poverty. It was not the race of poor blacks, but the cultural characteristics which they shared with poor whites that made the escape from poverty so difficult, he argued. But these cultural and behavioral characteristics, Banfield suggested, were more difficult to change than liberal reformers tended to assume.

Drawing upon a mountain of social scientific research on social class, Banfield contended that each class exhibits a distinct pattern of attitudes, values, and modes of behavior. Central to each pattern, he argued, was the degree of orientation toward the future. While he discussed the upper, middle, and working classes in these terms, Banfield was particularly interested in the difference between the time-orientation of these “normal” classes and that of what he called the “lower class.” The members of that class, he wrote, tended to display an extreme present-orientation, which had little place for the planning and deferred gratification so essential to functioning in modern society. Much of the failings of contemporary social policy, he claimed, was based on confusing the lower class with the working class, and he sought to highlight their differences in behavior and future orientation. “The lower-class person lives from moment to moment, he is either unable or unwilling to take account of the future or to control his impulses. Impudence and irresponsibility are direct consequences of this failure to take the future into account . . . and these consequences have further consequences; being improvident and irresponsible, he is likely also to be unskilled, to move frequently from one dead-end job to another, to be a poor husband and father . . . .” Thus the culture of lower class males, Banfield wrote, stressed “masculinity” and “action” and tended to be unstable and violent.⁵ And that pattern of behavior tended to be culturally transmitted from generation to generation.

The Unheavenly City was replete with the recurrent conservative themes of human imperfection and the unanticipated negative consequences of governmental action. In focusing on the culture of the lower class as an ongoing determinant of social position, Banfield linked the recurrent conservative emphasis on the importance of manners and mores with the theme of the ineluctability of inequality. The book concluded with an ironic and anti-humanitarian message: the prime beneficiaries of government programs aimed at the elimination of urban poverty, he suggested, were the humanitarian consciences of the upper classes. As for the concrete effects of the War on Poverty programs on poverty, they were negative when they were not merely worthless.

³ Ibid., p. 238.
⁴ Ibid., pp. 214–15.
The Unheavenly City was a succès de scandale. The book sold one hundred thousand copies, an extraordinary number for a work of social scientific analysis. It was greeted with rage by liberal and leftist intellectuals. At a time when the American New Left was just beyond the peak of its strength and vehemence, the book and its author were vilified on campuses from coast to coast. At Harvard, the leading New Left group on campus, Students for a Democratic Society, held regular demonstrations denouncing Banfield. His scheduled lectures at a number of major universities were canceled due to threats of violence. The book also generated a wave of responses by other social scientists.

In 1974, Banfield published a revised version of his book under the title The Unheavenly City Revisited, in which he sought to clarify his claims and complement the book’s theses with additional information. The selection below is taken from the concluding chapters of that book. Banfield’s footnotes have been excised.

Edward Banfield,  
*The Unheavenly City Revisited* (1974)

**The Future of the Lower Class**

So long as the city contains a sizable lower class, nothing basic can be done about its most serious problems. Good jobs may be offered to all, but some will remain chronically unemployed. Slums may be demolished, but if the housing that replaces them is occupied by the lower class it will shortly be turned into new slums. Welfare payments may be doubled or tripled and a negative income tax instituted, but some persons will continue to live in squalor and misery. New schools may be built, new curricula devised, and the teacher-pupil ratio cut in half, but if the children who attend these schools come from lower-class homes, the schools will be turned into blackboard jungles, and those who graduate or drop out from them will in most cases, be functionally illiterate. The streets may be filled with armies of policemen, but violent crime and civil disorder will decrease very little. If, however, the lower class were to disappear—if, say, its members were overnight to acquire the attitudes, motivations, and habits of the working class—the most serious and intractable problems of the city would all disappear with it.

As the last several chapters have contended, the serious problems of the city all exist in two forms—a normal-class and a lower-class form—which are fundamentally different from each other. In its normal-class form, the employment problem, for example, consists mainly of young people who are just entering the labor market and who must make a certain number of trials and errors before finding suitable jobs; in its lower-class form, it consists of people who prefer the “action” of the street to any steady job. The poverty problem in its normal-class form consists of people (especially the aged, the physically handicapped, and mothers with dependent children) whose only need in order to live decently is money; in its lower-class form it consists of people who would live in squalor and misery even if their incomes were doubled or tripled. The same is true with the other problems—slum housing, schools, crime, rioting; each is really two quite different problems. The lower-class forms of all problems are at bottom a single problem: the existence of an outlook and style of life which is radically present-oriented and which therefore attaches no value to work, sacrifice, self-improvement, or service to family, friends, or community... 

Whether lower-class outlook and style of life will change—or can be changed—and, if so, under what circumstances and at what rate—are questions of great interest to policymakers. As was pointed out when the concept of class culture was introduced [earlier in the book], social scientists differ as to the relative importance of “social heredity” and “social machinery” in forming class patterns of attitudes, values, and modes of behavior. As was said before, both sets of influences are undoubtedly at work and interact in complex ways; undoubtedly, too, the relative importance of these forces, as well as the nature of their interaction, differs from one group to another and from one individual to another.

Whether because (as Walter B. Miller has insisted in a brilliant essay) they have been caught up in an ideological movement or for some other reason, since the late 1950s most social scientists have discounted heavily the view that the lower-class person has been permanently damaged by having been assimilated in infancy and early childhood into a pathological culture and instead have come to view the lower-class life style as an adaptation to the realities of poverty, racial and class discrimination, bad schooling, poor or nonexistent job opportunities, and, in general, “blocked opportunities.”

From the standpoint of its theorists, the War on Poverty of the 1960s represented an effort to eliminate the lower class. (That “poverty” was not to be regarded as solely, or even mainly, a matter of low income was

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1 From Edward C. Banfield, *The Unheavenly City Revisited* (Boston, 1974; reissued Prospect Heights, IL, 1990).
stressed by Michael Harrington in The Other America, a book which did much to create the public opinion that made possible the War on Poverty. His “most important analytic point,” Harrington wrote, was that “poverty in America forms a culture, a way of life and feeling.” Few social scientists supposed that raising incomes would of itself bring about the desired changes in the life style of “the poor.” Higher incomes were a necessary but not a sufficient condition for this. It was crucial to change the “opportunity structure” in many ways: by ending racial discrimination, providing job training, improving schools, housing, and health care, and enabling and encouraging “the poor” to participate in the making of neighborhood and community decisions. A “service strategy,” as it was called, would lead to higher incomes, but, what was of fundamental importance, it would change the individual’s attitudes and habits, cause him to gain self-confidence and self-respect, and thus render him able and willing to move out of lower-class and into normal (“mainstream”) culture.

Whatever its achievements in other directions, the War on Poverty did not change the style of life of “the poor.”... 

Even on the most optimistic assumptions as to the inducements offered them and their willingness and ability to respond to them, it is safe to say that lower-class persons will not disappear in the foreseeable future. Although a very small part of the population, they are nevertheless numerous enough to generate social problems—violent crime, for example—of great seriousness in the eyes of the society and there is at least the possibility that their numbers will increase rather than decrease in the future. It is necessary, therefore, to consider further the future of that portion of the lower class—a small one, perhaps—which will persist no matter what changes are made in “social machinery.”...

_What Can Be Done?_

Often travelers, technical advisers, or “old hands” from a given country return with tales of how disorganized, dishonest, or untrustworthy the people are, but once the tales have been told, everyone settles down to a theoretical description of, or plan for, the economy of that country which does not take into account in any formal way the psychological characteristics of the people just described.—David McClelland

It will be convenient to approach the question that forms the title of this chapter by distinguishing the feasible from the acceptable. A measure is _feasible_ if (and only if) government (local, state, or national) could constitutionally implement it and if its implementation would result in the achievement of some specified goal or level of output at a cost that is not obviously prohibitive. For example, it is not feasible for every city dweller to have a one-acre lot (physical reality prevents), for every child to get a high school education as distinguished from a high school diploma (social and perhaps even biological reality prevent), to prohibit the movement of the poor from one city to another (this would be unconstitutional), or to replace the present cities with new ones in the space of a few years (the cost would be wildly out of relation to the benefits). The acceptability of a measure does not depend upon its feasibility: a measure is _acceptable_ if those who have authority in government (elected or appointed officials or sometimes voters) are willing to try to carry it into effect. Thus, a measure could be entirely feasible but quite unacceptable or entirely acceptable and quite infeasible.

It goes without saying that it is often impossible to know in advance whether a particular measure is either feasible or acceptable. One can rarely be sure that the knowledge needed to make the measure “work” is at hand or within reach; its constitutionality may be in doubt; and there is always some possibility that unanticipated consequences will make its cost prohibitively high. (“Cost” in this context means any undesired effect or forgone advantage, not just an outlay of money or material resources.) These practical difficulties do not affect the validity of the distinction, however, or destroy its usefulness for purposes of analysis.

This chapter tries to show, first, that the range of feasible measures for dealing with the serious problems of the cities is much narrower than one might think, and, second, that within this range hardly any of the feasible measures are acceptable. If what is feasible is not, in general, acceptable, the reverse is also true: what is acceptable is not, in general, feasible. Moreover, government seems to have a perverse tendency to adopt measures which—if the analysis in the preceding chapters is not far wrong—are the very opposite of those that one would recommend.2 The reasons for this perversity are to be found in the nature of American political institutions and, especially, in the influence on public opinion of the upper-class cultural ideal of “service” and “responsibility to the community.”

Clearly, a measure is infeasible if aimed at the simultaneous attainment of mutually exclusive ends. Two persons cannot both be satisfied if one’s satisfaction is _constituted_ of the other’s nonsatisfaction. Insofar

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2 An example of the conservative emphasis on the unintended negative consequences of deliberate action.

3 Banfield announces the antihumanitarian theme of the critique of good intentions that figures prominently in this chapter.
as the poverty problem, for example, has this relational character (that is, insofar as it is one of "relative deprivation"), it is insoluble. In Hollywood, Leo C. Rosten writes, "it is natural for the actress who earns $20,000 a year to envy the actress who earns $50,000 who envies the actress making $100,000. In a community where one can make $350,000 a year, $75,000 a year is not especially impressive—either to the group or the self." The same problem arises, of course, even in the least glamorous places and with people of very ordinary income. That objective differences in income can be reduced to almost nothing does not necessarily mean that the problem of relative deprivation can be solved, for the smaller objective difference in income may come to have a greater subjective importance. The same problem arises with the distribution of things other than income. It is in the nature of deference, for example, that some persons receive more than others. There is really no way to prevent those who receive relatively little from perceiving that fact and being made unhappy or suffering a loss of self-respect because of it. As Frank H. Knight has written, "The real scarcity which seriously afflicts individualistic civilization is the scarcity of such things as distinction, spectacular achievements, honor, victory, and power." Since there can never be enough of these things to go around, the problem of poverty with respect to them is logically insoluble.

There are many other major problems which, although they differ from this one in (presumably) not having a logical structure that makes them inherently insolvable, are nevertheless unsolved and, for all anyone knows, may remain so. Although an economist of the first rank, Kenneth J. Arrow, has recently said that he thinks it "most likely that the reconciliation of full employment and price stability can be significantly improved in the future," the problem appears to be one that cannot be eliminated. A problem of even greater magnitude which seems no less resistant to solution is that of ensuring that all children acquire the attitudes and skills without which they cannot live on mutually acceptable terms with society later on.\(^4\) Albert K. Cohen, in his path-breaking book of nearly twenty years ago, *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang*, posed a series of questions which have gone unanswered:

Of these various circumstances and features of our social system which are involved in the production of the delinquent subculture, which are subject to deliberate control? From the purely technical standpoint, exactly how is it possible to manipulate them in accordance with our wishes? How, for example, can we enable the work-

\(^4\) The conservative theme of human imperfectionability is here linked to the emphasis on manners and mores.

ing-class male to compete more effectively for status in a largely middle-class world...? What price are we willing to pay for this or that change?

When "solutions" are offered without specification of the means by which they are to be reached, it must be presumed that the means—if any exist—have yet to be discovered and that the “solution” is therefore infeasible. Doubtless a “change in the hearts and minds of men” would solve a great many problems. But how is it to be brought about? Except as the means are outlined and except as there is some real possibility of their being implemented, such “solutions” are mere words. They are seldom if ever labeled as such, however, even when put forward by highly professional social analysts. Consider, for example, the following, written not as a Commencement Day Oration but as a contribution to a leading journal of economics:

We believe that resolution of the [urban] crisis is possible if political majorities are future-oriented enough to adopt constitutional reforms which not only benefit the lower classes but serve the majority's long-run self-interest. If these political majorities have the foresight to adopt fundamental, constitutional-type change, fulfillment can be harnessed to hope, and an urban society that is just, humane, and truly free can be a reality.

The authors stop there. They offer no grounds whatever for believing that political majorities will change their ways and they say not a word about the steps that one (who?) might take to get them to do so.

Those who use the terminology of social science may talk of changing “culture,” rather than “hearts and minds.” The fact is, however, that no one knows how to change the culture of any part of the population—the lower class or the upper, whites or Negroes, pupils or teachers, policemen or criminals. Moreover, even if one did know how, there is good reason to suppose that doing so would be infeasible on other grounds; for example, it might require unconstitutitional methods, such as taking infants from their parents at birth, or entail other disadvantages that more than offset its advantages.

What can an educational psychologist, Jerome Bruner, mean by writing that the plight of the poor in our society probably cannot be changed without first changing “the society that permits such poverty to exist,” and that accordingly his “first recommendation, as a commonsense psychologist and a concerned man, would be that we should transform radically the structure of our society”? Can it be that he thinks “society” is an entity having faculties enabling it to “permit” conditions to exist—that is, to exercise choice regarding them? (If so, why not crit-
icize it for permitting any social problem to exist?) Assuming that society is able to permit, is it likely to permit “us” to transform it in such a way that it can no longer permit what it previously permitted, namely poverty? Assuming that it will permit this, how does one transform radically the structure of society? (Apparently it is not always easy; Christopher Jencks remarks sadly in Inequality that the rate of social mobility “does not seem to respond to most of the things that social theorists expect it to respond to.”) Finally, assuming that the effort would succeed, what grounds are there for supposing that the new, restructured society will not permit evils even worse than poverty?

Some “solutions” are infeasible because (1) there is no reason to expect people to do the things that would constitute a solution unless government motivates them to do them, and (2) government for one reason or another cannot so motivate them. If, as Lee Rainwater asserts, “only effective protest can change endemic patterns of police harassment and brutality, or teachers’ indifference and insults, or butchers’ heavy thumbs, or indifferent street cleaning and garbage disposal,” then assuming that effective protest must be carried on from outside the government, measures to correct these abuses lie beyond the bounds of feasibility. In other words, if there are solutions to these problems they are not governmental ones, which is to say that one cannot implement them by calling into play the state’s ultimate monopoly on the use of force.

Repeal of the minimum-wage laws is certainly feasible, but elimination of the informal minimum wage, which would reduce unemployment among the low-skilled even more, is not. Government cannot prevent the formation of a social definition of what is a “decent” wage, and (what amounts to the same thing) it cannot prevent workers from feeling some loss of self-respect in working for “peanuts.” From the standpoint of the policymaker, then, the informal minimum wage presents an insoluble problem.

In the nature of the case, it is impossible to have a very clear idea of what government can and cannot do in the way of forming public opinion. Nothing except the elimination of lower-class culture would contribute as much to a general solution of the urban problem as would certain changes in public opinion—for example, greater awareness of the importance of class-cultural and other nonracial factors in the Negro’s situation and a more realistic sense of what levels of performance it is reasonable to expect from such institutions as schools and police forces and from the economy as a whole. However, it is very questionable to what extent, if at all, government can bring these changes about. It is a question also whether if it can bring them about it ought to—that is, whether the unintended and long-run effects of a strenuous exercise of its opinion-forming capacities would not be likely to change American society for the worse rather than for the better.

People often respond to government measures by making adaptations the aggregate effect of which is to render the measures ineffective or even injurious. Thus, for example, the principal obstacle in the way of permanently maintaining full employment by fiscal policy devices is that investors respond to the price outlook in such a way as to check any policy except the impossible one of a continuous and accelerating inflation. Other examples of the same phenomenon are easy to find. Subsidies to induce employers to hire “hard-core” workers achieve very little because the employers tend to make adjustments (which may be perfectly legitimate) that enable them to take the subsidies while employing workers who are not significantly different from those whom they would have employed anyway. Similarly, efforts to reduce unemployment, poverty, or slum housing in a particular city may be counterproductive in that they attract more poor workers to the city. Thus, the Wall Street Journal reports from Detroit:

A massive industry effort to help avert future riots in Detroit appears to be backfiring as hundreds—possibly thousands—of unemployed persons from out of state come to the city seeking work.

The result: Some out-of-staters have failed to get a job, swelling the unemployment that many believe contributed to last July’s riot.

Others have snapped up jobs that might have gone to the city’s own so-called hard-core unemployed.

There is much to be said for the idea of giving small sums at any hour of day or night to persons, mostly youths, who might otherwise steal or kill to get the price of a few drinks or a “fix” of heroin. It would not be feasible to do this, however, because of the adaptive behavior that it would evoke. Once it became known that money was being given away (and of course the scheme would not work unless it was known), the demand would become too great to satisfy.

Essentially the same problem may exist with any welfare program that offers generous support to all who can be considered poor. Such a program may weaken rather than strengthen the self-esteem of its beneficiaries by reinforcing their impression that events are beyond their control. It may also encourage them to adapt to the new situation in ways that are in the long run disadvantageous to them and destructive of the welfare system itself—for example, by taking steps to make themselves eligible (the wife leaving her job, perhaps, or lying about the number of dependents) they may “swamp” the system with their numbers. As Leitman, Rein, and Marwick remark, “Adequate benefits to relieve poverty
conflict with a coherent incentive system to encourage work” and “all the good will and exhortation of welfare reformers have failed to offer a viable solution . . . to the dilemma.”

Some “solutions” are infeasible because the very feature(s) of social reality that constitute the problem make them impracticable. Training programs do not as a rule offer any solution to the problem of hard-core unemployment because the same qualities that make a worker hard-core also make him unable or unwilling to accept training. More generally, giving lower-class persons “really good” jobs is not a feasible way of inducing them to change their style of life, because that very style of life makes it impossible to give them “really good” jobs.

“Solutions” that deal with minor, as opposed to key or strategic, factors in a situation are also infeasible. To put the matter in another way, it does not help to create a necessary condition when there is no way of creating the sufficient conditions; similarly, in situations of multiple causation, it is of little use to set in motion a cause that contributes a trivial amount to the total effect desired when there is no way to set in motion those that would contribute a significant amount to it. It is less than likely that the McConne Commission, in its report on the background of the Watts riot, was correct in asserting that “an adequate mid-day meal is essential to a meaningful educational experience” (it may be a contributing factor, but it is certainly not essential). Even assuming for the sake of argument that the commission was correct, the conclusion does not follow that a school lunch program would have an appreciable effect on the problem of preventing riots of the sort that occurred in Watts. The school lunch program “solution,” however desirable it might be on other grounds, would not touch a great many much more important causes that would make riots just as likely as ever.

The assumption that an improvement in material welfare is bound to make a major contribution to the solution of almost any social problem is a pervasive one: better nutrition, better housing, better transportation, better street cleaning and refuse removal—all such things are commonly seen as ways of reducing crime, of preventing the break-up of the family, of encouraging upward social mobility, and so on. Although one cannot often find clear evidence of it, such measures probably do have some such effects. Even so, the policymaker must ask with regard to them the question that was raised about midday meals: is the contribution that this one cause can make to the total effect (i.e. to the “solution” of the problem) likely to be more than trivial? Following such a procedure in his discussion of the efficacy of various types of social policy in reducing the “deficits” of the average Negro, James S. Coleman finds that housing, health, and public education (for example) are fields from which the contributions are likely to be small in relation to the problem.

Even if it is feasible in all other respects, a measure lies outside the bounds of feasibility if its implementation would entail costs that more than offset its benefits. The proponents of a particular measure are usually blessed with both myopia and tunnel vision: they can see only the immediate and direct effects that would follow from the attainment of their objective; long-run or indirect effects, especially ones pertinent to what may be called background values, are quite invisible to them. Proponents of rent control, for example, see an immediate advantage to the poor in freezing rents at low levels. But they fail to see the harm that this will do to the whole community—and especially to the poor—because the harm will be indirect and more or less delayed. One immediate—but somewhat indirect and therefore hard to see—harm to the poor consists in preventing them from outbidding the nonpoor for housing that they (the poor) could afford because they would occupy it more intensively. (As Thomas Sowell points out, rent control drastically reduces any incentive real estate agents and landlords have to break down ethnic and racial barriers.) Another immediate but somewhat indirect injury to the poor is the lowering of maintenance standards and services—heat and light, for example—that occurs when the landlord is bound to get the same (fixed) rent no matter how much or little he does for his tenants. In the longer run—and therefore harder to see—are injuries to neighborhoods and to the city as a whole: the formation of slums as buildings go unrepaired year after year, the growing frustration and anger of those who cannot move because they are not permitted to compete for housing, and the decrease in the total housing supply because investors, who in the absence of rent control would build new units or rehabilitate old ones, decide to put their money elsewhere.

An important special case of infeasibility resulting from a disproportion between costs and benefits exists when the implementation of a measure would require organization of a kind unsuitable for the implementation of other, equally desirable measures. Coleman, in making this point, remarks that it is safe to say that no city will consciously unequalize schools in order to pull suburbanites back into the city or stabilize neighborhoods. It is not for lack of social organization that cities will fail to do this, he says, but because of organization that is inappropriate; whether there could be organization appropriate to solve this problem and yet not inappropriate to solve other problems he considers questionable. “Paradoxically,” he concludes, “in this instance organization itself helps bring about disorganization and disintegration of the city.”

There follows a list of some of the principal measures that might well be regarded as feasible by one who accepts the analysis in the previous chapters. (It will be recalled that by “feasible” is meant capable of being
implemented and likely to accomplish something of more than trivial value at a cost not obviously prohibitive.) It will be seen that the list is rather short; that many of the items on it are not “constructive”—that is, they call for not doing something; and that far from being a comprehensive program for making the city into what one would like, it hardly begins to solve any of the problems that have been under discussion. Even if all the recommendations were carried out to the full, the urban situation would not be fundamentally improved. Feasible measures are few and unsatisfactory as compared to what it would be nice to have happen or what one would do if one were dictator. What is more to the present point, however, hardly any of the feasible measures are acceptable. The list is as follows:

1. Assure to all equal access to polling places, courts, and job, housing, and other markets.

2. Avoid rhetoric tending to raise expectations to unreasonable and unrealizable levels, to encourage the individual to think that “society” (e.g., “white racism”), not he, is responsible for his ills, and to exaggerate both the seriousness of social problems and the possibility of finding solutions.

3. If it is feasible to do so (the disagreement among economists has been noted earlier), use fiscal policy to keep the general unemployment level below 3 percent. In any case, remove impediments to the employment of the unskilled, the unschooled, the young, Negroes, women, and others by (a) repealing the minimum-wage and occupational licensure laws and laws that enable labor unions to exercise monopolistic powers, (b) ceasing to overpay for low-skilled public employment; (c) ceasing to harass private employers who offer low wages and unattractive (but not unsafe) working conditions to workers whose alternative is unemployment, and (d) offer wage supplements in the form of “scholarships” to enable boys and girls who have received little schooling to get jobs with employers who offer valuable on-the-job training.

4. Revise elementary and secondary school curricula so as to cover in nine grades what is now covered in twelve. Reduce the school-leaving age to fourteen (grade 9), and encourage (or perhaps even require) boys and girls who are unable or unwilling to go to college to take a full-time job or else enter military service or a civilian youth corps. Guarantee loans for higher education to all who require them. Assure the availability of serious on-the-job training for all boys and girls who choose to go to work rather than to go to college.

5. Define poverty in terms of the nearly fixed standard of “hardship,” rather than in terms of the elastic one of “relative deprivation,” and bring all incomes above the poverty line. Distinguish categorically between those of the poor who are competent to manage their affairs and those of them who are not, the latter category consisting of the insane, the severely retarded, the senile, the lower class (inveterate “problem families”), and unprotected children. Make cash income transfers to the first category by means of a negative income tax, the rate structure of which gives the recipient a strong incentive to work. Whenever possible, assist the incompetent poor with goods and services rather than with cash; depending upon the degree of their incompetence, encourage (or require) them to reside in an institution or semi-institution (for example, a closely supervised public housing project).

6. Give intensive birth-control guidance to the incompetent poor.

7. Pay “problem families” to send infants and children to day nurseries and preschools, the programs of which are designed to bring the children into normal culture.

8. Regulate insurance and police practices so as to give potential victims of crime greater incentive to take reasonable precautions to prevent it.

9. Intensify police patrol in high-crime areas; permit the police to “stop and frisk” and to make misdemeanor arrests on probable cause, institute a system of “negative bail”—that is, an arrangement whereby a suspect who is held in jail and is later found innocent is paid compensation for each day of confinement.

10. Reduce drastically the time elapsing between arrest, trial, and imposition of punishment.

11. Abridge to an appropriate degree the freedom of those who in the opinion of a court are extremely likely to commit violent crimes. Confine and treat drug addicts.

12. Make it clear in advance that those who incite to riot will be severely punished.

13. Prohibit “live” television coverage of riots and of incidents likely to provoke them.

There can be little doubt that with a few exceptions these recommendations are unacceptable. A politician with a heterogeneous constituency would strenuously oppose almost all of them. In most matters, the actual course of policy is likely to be the very opposite of the one recommended, whichever party is in power. Government is more likely to promote unequal than equal access to job and housing markets either by failing to enforce laws prohibiting discrimination or by “enforcing” them in a way (for example, by “affirmative action”) that is itself discriminatory. It is also more likely to raise expectations than to lower them; to emphasize “white racism” as the continuing cause of the Negro’s handicaps rather than to de-emphasize it; to increase the minimum wage rather than to decrease or repeal it; to keep children who cannot or will not learn in school a longer rather than a shorter time; to
define poverty in terms of relative deprivation rather than in terms of hardship; to deny the existence of class-cultural differences rather than to try to distinguish the competent from the incompetent poor on this basis; to reduce the potential victim's incentives to take precautions against crime rather than to increase them; to give the police less discretionary authority rather than more; to increase the time between arrest, trial, and punishment rather than to decrease it; and to enlarge the freedom of those who have shown themselves to be very likely to commit violent crimes rather than to restrict it.

One reason why these recommendations are politically out of the question is that there exist well-armed and strategically placed veto groups (as David Riesman calls them in *The Lonely Crowd*) which can prevent them from being seriously discussed, much less adopted. The recommendation of the Moynihan Report, that government try to strengthen the Negro family, is a case in point: official consideration of this idea had to stop abruptly when the civil-rights organizations and their allies objected. What these organizations did with this proposal organized labor could do with one to free up the labor market, organized teachers could do with one to reduce the school-leaving age, organized social workers could do with one to define poverty in terms of hardship, and so on.

That interest groups have such power does not represent a malfunctioning of the political system. When they designed the system, the Founding Fathers took great pains to distribute power widely so that “factions” would check one another, thus preventing the rise of any sort of tyranny. The arrangement has worked remarkably well, but there is no denying that it has the defects of its virtues. One of these defects is that a small minority can often veto measures that would benefit a large majority.

Obviously, proposals are frequently adopted despite the opposition of such groups. Why does this not happen in the case of the measures recommended above? There are more prospective gainers than losers from each measure (if this were not thought to be so, the measures would not have been recommended); why, then, do not the prospective gainers organize themselves to overcome the opposition of the veto groups? At the very least, why do they not themselves function as veto groups when the opposites of the measures that would serve their interests are proposed? For example, if they cannot get the minimum-wage law repealed, why do they not at least prevent the rate from being raised?

Part of the answer to these questions is that in most instances the benefits from the recommended measures would be what economists call “public goods”—that is, goods such that if anyone benefited everyone would benefit. This being the case, the prospective gainers can “ride free” and therefore have little or no incentive to contribute to the support of an organization to fight for the benefits. Another part of the answer is that the voter must usually accept or reject combinations of measures (what the candidate or the party stands for); he cannot pick and choose, he must cast his vote one way or the other. His choice therefore turns upon his evaluation of the one or two items in the “package” that touch his primary (which in many cases means his bread-and-butter) interests most closely; if he thinks that his primary interests are well served by these one or two items, he will vote in favor of the “package” even though it contains many other items that are undesirable from the standpoint of his subsidiary interests. Thus, even if the measures recommended above would benefit every voter without exception, there would nevertheless be a unanimous vote against them if they were presented in combinations such that each voter could serve one of his primary interests only by voting against them. In their effort to bring together winning coalitions of interests, candidates and parties tend to be very much aware of such considerations.

Public opinion consists largely of opinions on subjects that do not touch the primary interests of the one holding the opinion, and if political choices were made only in the light of primary interests, public opinion would matter very little. In fact, of course, it matters a good deal. And there can be no doubt that it supports practically none of the recommendations on the list above. Indeed, in many matters it favors the opposite. In part, then, the perversity that government exhibits in its choice of measures reflects a corresponding perversity in public opinion.

It is pertinent to inquire, therefore, why public opinion is perverse. An answer sometimes given is that in matters such as these it is generally dominated by the opinion of the well-educated and well-off. These people (so the argument runs) are indifferent to or downright hostile to the interest of the less well-off and the poor. In short, the “masses” are against the recommended measures because they have been misled by an elite that is looking after its own interests.

The trouble with this theory is that with respect to most measures it runs counter to the facts. The well-off are not benefited by an increase in the minimum wage or by any other measures that price low-value labor out of the market and onto the welfare rolls. They are not bene-

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6 In 1965 the US Department of Labor published “The Negro Family: The Case for Action,” by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then an assistant secretary in the department. In it he called attention to the fact that the out-of-wedlock birth rate among blacks was 26 percent, which he regarded as part of “the tangle of pathology” among the black poor, along with factors such as poor school performance and high rates of male desertion, welfare dependency, and crime. The report was denounced by the left for “blaming the victim”, the vehement response to the report stalled any discussion of the state of the black family in mainstream liberal circles.
fitted by laws that keep children who cannot or will not learn in schools that they (the well-off) must support. They are not benefited by the making of sweeping charges about “white racism” or by crisis-mongering of any kind.

Public opinion is indeed decisively influenced in many matters by the opinion of the well-educated and well-off. But this opinion, which reflects the “service” ideal of the upper class, tends to be altruistic. And it is precisely this altruistic bias that accounts for its perversity.6

The American political style was formed largely in the upper classes and, within those classes, mainly by people of dissenting-Protestant and Jewish traditions. Accordingly, it is oriented toward the future and toward moral and material progress, for the individual and for the society as a whole. The American is confident that with a sufficient effort all difficulties can be overcome and all problems solved, and he feels a strong obligation to try to improve not only himself but everything else: his community, his society, the whole world. Ever since the days of Cotton Mather, whose *Bonifacius* was a how-to-do-it book on the doing of good, service has been the American motto. To be sure, practice has seldom entirely corresponded to principles. The principles, however, have always been influential and they have sometimes been decisive. They can be summarized in two very simple rules: first, DON’T JUST SIT THERE. DO SOMETHING! and second, DO GOOD!

These two rules contribute to the perversity that characterizes the choice of measures for dealing with the urban “crisis.” From the President down everyone (almost everyone) enjoys the feeling of exhilaration when a bold step is taken, and that enjoyment is no less when, as it almost always must be, the step is taken blindfold. Believing that any problem can be solved if only we try hard enough, we do not hesitate to attempt what we do not have the least idea of how to do and what, in some instances, reason and experience both tell us cannot be done. Not recognizing any bounds to what is feasible, we are not reconciled to—indeed, we do not even perceive—the necessity, so frequently arising, of choosing the least objectionable among courses of action that are all very unsatisfactory. That some children simply cannot be taught much in school is one example of a fact that the American mind will not entertain. Our cultural ideal requires that we give every child a good education whether he wants it or not and whether he is capable of receiving it or not. If at first we don’t succeed, we must try, try again. And if in the end we don’t succeed, we must feel guilty for our failure. To lower the school-leaving age would be, in the terms of this secular religion, a shirking of the task for which we were chosen.

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6 Banfield returns to the antihumanitarian critique of good intentions.
concern for what is right and just than that the material level of the poor, which is already above the level of hardship in most cases, be raised somewhat higher. There are problems here, however. One is to keep the impulse for doing good from gushing incontinently into mass extravaganzas—domestic Marshall Plans, Freedom Budgets, and the like—into which billions are poured for no one knows what or how; surely, if it is to be morally significant, good cannot be done from motives that are contrived for the individual by people who have large organizations to maintain or foisted upon him by the mass media. Another problem is to find ways of doing good that are relatively harmless—that do not greatly injure those to whom the good is done (as, for example, children who cannot or will not learn are injured by too-long confinement in school), that are not grossly unfair to third parties (taxpayers, for example), and that do not tend to damage the consensual basis, and thus eventually the political freedom, of the society (as headline-catching official declarations about “white racism” do). Still another problem is to retain, as an element of the cultural ideal itself, what Lionel Trilling has termed moral realism—“the perception of the dangers of the moral life itself.”

If the process of middle- and upper-classification tends to make public opinion more perverse, it also tends to make it more important. Half a century or more ago, the basis of city and state political power—and therefore, to a large extent, of national political power as well—was the machine. The bosses who ran it kept themselves in power by dispensing patronage and by trading in ethnic, sectional, and party loyalties, and therefore could pretty well disregard public opinion when it suited them to do so. Middle- and upper-classification rendered this system obsolete and brought into being one in which the politician, in order to compete successfully for office, has to combine offers of benefits to classes of voters (homeowners, taxpayers, and so on) with appeals to general ideas and conceptions of the public interest. Whereas the old system had promised personal rewards, the new one promises social reforms. Accordingly, the smoke-filled room was replaced by the talk-filled one. “The amount of talk which is now expended on all subjects of human interest is something of which a previous age has had not the smallest conception,” E. L. Godkin remarked at the end of the last century, adding that “the affairs of nations and of men will be more and more regulated by talk.” But even Godkin, since he did not anticipate television, had not the smallest conception of the extent to which affairs would be regulated by talk in our day.

The politician, like the TV news commentator, must always have something to say even when nothing urgently needs to be said. If he lived in a society without problems, he would have to invent some (and of course “solutions” along with them) in order to attract attention and to kindle the interest and enthusiasm needed to carry him into office and enable him, once there, to levy taxes and do the other unpopular things of which governing largely consists. Although in the society that actually exists there are many problems, there are still not enough—enough about which anyone can say or do anything very helpful—to meet his constant need for program material. Moreover, the real and important problems are not necessarily the ones that people want to hear about; a politician may be able to attract more attention and create more enthusiasm—and thus better serve his purpose, which is to generate power with which to take office and govern—by putting real problems in an unreal light or by presenting illusory ones as if they were real. The politician (again like the TV news commentator) can never publicly discuss an important matter with the seriousness that it deserves; time is short, ifs, ands, and buts make tedious listening, and there are always some in the audience who will be confused or offended by what is said and others who will try to twist it into a weapon that they can use against the speaker. Besides, the deeper a discussion goes, the less likelihood of reaching an outcome that the politician can use to generate support.

The changes brought about in the political system by the process of middle- and upper-classification have greatly reduced its effectiveness in finding the terms on which people will act together or even live together in peace. The upper-class ideal recommends participation as intrinsically good, but unfortunately, the more participants there are, the larger the number of issues that must be dealt with and the greater the disagreements about each. The ideal also requires that issues be settled on their merits, not by logrolling, and that their merits be conceived of in terms of general moral principles that may not, under any circumstances, be compromised. In the smoke-filled room, it was party loyalty and private interest that largely moved men; these motives always permitted “doing business.” In the talk-filled room, righteous indignation is the main motive, and therefore the longer the talk continues, the clearer it becomes to each side that the other must either be shouted down or knocked down.

If we look toward the future, it is impossible not to be apprehensive. The frightening fact is that large numbers of persons are being rapidly assimilated to the upper classes and are coming to have incomes—time as well as money—that permit them to indulge their taste for “service” and doing good in political action. Television, even more than the newspapers, tends to turn the discussion of public policy issues into a branch of the mass entertainment industry. Doing good is becoming—as already become—a growth industry, like the other forms of mass entertainment, while righteous indignation and uncompromising allegiance
principle are becoming the motives of political commitment. This is
the way it is in the affluent, middle-class society. How will it be in the
super-affluent, upper-middle-class one?

The Prospect

It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the serious problems of the
cities will continue to exist in something like their present form for an-
other twenty years at least. Even on the most favorable assumptions we
shall have large concentrations of the poor and the unskilled, and—
what, to repeat, is by no means the same thing—the lower class in the
central cities and the larger, older suburbs. The outward movement of
industry and commerce is bound to continue, leaving ever-larger parts
of the inner city blighted or semi-abandoned. Even if we could afford to
throw the existing cities away and build new ones from scratch, matters
would not be essentially different, for the people who move into the new
cities would take the same old problems with them. Eventually, the
present problems of the cities will disappear or dwindle into relative un-
importance; they will not, however, be "solved" by programs of the sort
undertaken in the past decade. On the contrary, the tendency of such
programs would be to prolong the problems and perhaps even make
them worse.

For the most part, the problems in question have arisen from and are
inseparably connected with developments that almost everyone wel-
comes: the growth and spread of affluence has enabled millions of peo-
ple to move from congested cities to new and more spacious homes in
the suburbs; the availability of a large stock of relatively good housing in
the central cities and older suburbs has enabled the Negro to escape the
semi-slavery of the rural South and, a century late, to move into indus-
trial society; better public health measures and facilities have cut the
deathrate of the lower class; the war and postwar baby boom have left
the city with more adolescents and youths than ever before; and a wide-
spread and general movement upward on the class-cultural scale has
made poverty, squalor, ignorance, and brutality—conditions that have
always and everywhere been regarded as inevitable in the nature of things—appear as anomalies that should be removed entirely and at
once.

What stands in the way of dealing effectively with these problems (in-
sofar as their nature admits of their being dealt with by government) is
mainly the virtues of the American political system and of the American
character. It is because governmental power is widely distributed that
organized interests are so often able to veto measures that would benefit
large numbers of people. It is the generous and public-regarding im-
pulses of voters and taxpayers that impel them to support measures—for
example, the minimum wage and compulsory high school attendance—
the ultimate effect of which is to make the poor poorer and more demor-
alized. Our devotion to the doctrine that all men are created equal
discourages any explicit recognition of class-cultural differences and leads
to "democratic"—and often misleading—formulations of problems: for
example, poverty as lack of income and material resources (something
external to the individual) rather than as inability or unwillingness to
take account of the future or to control impulses (something internal).
Sympathy for the oppressed, indignation at the oppressor, and a wish to
make amends for wrongs done by one's ancestors lead to a misrepresen-
tation of the Negro as the near-helpless victim of "white racism." Faith
in the perfectibility of man and confidence that good intentions to-
gether with strenuous exertions will hasten his progress onward and up-
ward lead to bold programs that promise to do what no one knows how
to do and what perhaps cannot be done, and therefore end in frustra-
tion, loss of mutual respect and trust, anger, and even coercion.

Even granting that in general the effect of government programs is to
exacerbate the problems of the cities, it might perhaps be argued that
they have a symbolic value that is more than redeeming. What econo-
mist Kenneth Boulding has said of national parks—that we seem to need
them "as we seem to need a useless dome on the capitol, as a symbol of
national identity and of that mutuality of concern and interest without
which government would be naked coercion"—may possibly apply as
well to Freedom Budgets, domestic Marshall Plans, and other such con-
cotions. That government programs do not succeed in reducing welfare
dependency, preventing crime, and so on, is not a weighty objection to
them if, for want of them the feeling would spread that the society is
"not worth saving." There is an imminent danger, however, that the
growing multitude of programs that are intended essentially as gestures
of goodwill may constitute a bureaucratic juggernaut which cannot be
stopped and which will symbolize not national identity and mutual con-
cern but rather divisiveness, confusion, and inequity. If a symbol is
wanted, a useless dome is in every way preferable.