

Edward C. Banfield, *The Unheavenly City Revisited*
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THE UNHEAVENLY CITY: THE NATURE AND
FUTURE OF OUR URBAN CRISIS

THE UNHEAVENLY CITY REVISITED

THE UNHEAVENLY CITY REVISITED

by EDWARD C. BANFIELD

A Revision of *The Unheavenly City*



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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.

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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)

9/2/74

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 pains-taking 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

in and out more conveniently that does not entail more than offsetting disadvantages for them or others, then we ought not to speak of a "traffic congestion problem." By the same token, urban sprawl is a "problem," as opposed to a "condition," only if (1) fewer people should have the satisfaction of living in the low-density fringe of the city, or (2) we might, by better planning, build homes in the fringe without destroying so much landscape and without incurring costs (for example, higher per-unit construction costs) or forgoing benefits (for example, a larger number of low-income families who can have the satisfaction of living in the low-density area) of greater value than the saving in landscape.

Few problems, in this strict sense, are anywhere near as big as they seem. The amount of urban sprawl that could be eliminated simply by better planning — that is, without the sacrifice of other ends that are also wanted, such as giving the satisfaction of owning a house and yard to many low-income people — is probably trivial as compared to the total urban sprawl (that is, to the "problem" defined simply-mindedly as "a condition that is unpleasant").

Many so-called urban problems (crime is a conspicuous exception) are more characteristic of rural and small-town places than of cities. Housing is generally worse in rural areas, for example, and so are schools. "Low verbal ability," Sloan R. Wayland of Columbia Teachers College has written, "is described as though it could only happen in an urban slum." Actually, he points out, all but a very small fraction of mankind has always been "culturally deprived," and the task of formal education has always been to attack such conditions.²

Most of the "problems" that are generally supposed to constitute "the urban crisis" could not conceivably lead to disaster. They are — some of them — important in the sense that a bad cold is important, but they are not critical in the sense that a cancer is critical. They have to do with comfort, convenience, amenity, and business advantage, all of which are important, but they do not affect either the essential welfare of individuals or what may be called the good health of the society.

Consider, for example, an item that often appears near the top of the list of complaints about the city — the journey to work. It takes

the average commuter between 21 and 34 minutes to get to work (the difference in the average time depending upon the population of the metropolitan area).³ It would, of course, be very nice if the journey to work were much shorter. No one can suppose, however, that the essential welfare of many people would be much affected even if it were fifteen minutes longer. Certainly its being longer or shorter would not make the difference between a good society and a bad.

Another matter causing widespread alarm is the decline of the central business district, by which is meant the loss of patronage to downtown department stores, theaters, restaurants, museums, and so on, which has resulted from the movement of many well-off people to suburbs. Clearly, the movement of good customers from one place to another involves inconvenience and business loss to many people, especially to the owners of real estate that is no longer in so great demand. These losses, however, are essentially no different from those that occur from other causes — say, a shift of consumer's tastes that suddenly renders a once-valuable patent valueless. Moreover, though some lose by the change, others gain by it: the overall gain of wealth by building in the suburbs may more than offset the loss of it caused by letting the downtown deteriorate.

There are those who claim that cultural and intellectual activity flourishes only in big cities and that therefore the decline of the downtown business districts and the replacement of cities by suburbs threatens the very survival of civilization. This claim is farfetched, to say the very least, if it means that we cannot have good music and good theater (not to mention philosophy, literature, and science) unless customers do their shopping in the downtown districts of Oakland, St. Louis, Nashville, Boston, and so on, rather than in the suburbs around them. Public efforts to preserve the downtown districts of these and other cities may perhaps be worth what they cost — although, so far as cultural and intellectual activities are concerned, there is no reason to assume that public efforts would not bring at least as much return if directed to metropolitan areas as wholes. The return, however, will be in the comfort, convenience, and business advantage of the relatively well-off and not in anyone's essential welfare.

The same can be said about efforts to "beautify" the cities. That for

the most part the cities are dreary and depressing if not offensively ugly may be granted: the desirability of improving their appearance, even if only a little, cannot be questioned. It is very doubtful, however, that people are dehumanized (to use a favorite word of those who complain about the cities) by the ugliness of the city or that they would be in any sense humanized by its being made beautiful. (If they were humanized, they would doubtless build beautiful cities, but that is an entirely different matter. One has only to read Machiavelli's *Florentine Histories* to see that living in a beautiful city is not in itself enough to bring out the best in one. So far as their humanity is concerned, the people of, say, Jersey City compare very favorably to the Florentines of the era of that city's greatest glory.) At worst, the American city's ugliness—or, more, its lack of splendor or charm—occasions loss of visual pleasure. This loss is an important one (it is surely much larger than most people realize), but it cannot lead to any kind of disaster either for the individual or for the society.

Air pollution comes closer than any of these problems to threatening essential welfare, as opposed to comfort, convenience, amenity, and business advantage. Some people die early because of it and many more suffer various degrees of bad health; there is also some possibility (no one knows how much) that a meteorological coincidence (an "air inversion") over a large city might suddenly kill thousands or even tens of thousands. Important as it is, however, the air pollution problem is rather minor as compared to other threats to health and welfare not generally regarded as "crises."⁴ Moreover, steps are being taken to clear the air. The Clean Air Act Amendment of 1970 is expected to reduce pollution from auto emissions (by far the most serious source) to half of what they were in 1967 (the base year) by 1980 and to a quarter by 1985.⁵

Many of the "problems" that are supposed to constitute the "crisis" could be quickly and easily solved, or much alleviated, by the application of well-known measures that lie right at hand. In some instances, the money cost of these measures would be very small. For example, the rush-hour traffic problem in the central cities (which, incidentally, is almost the whole of the traffic problem in these cities) could be much reduced and in some cases eliminated entirely just by staggering working hours in the largest offices and factories. Manhattan presents

the hardest case of all, but even there, an elaborate study showed, rush-hour crowding could be reduced by 25 percent, enough to make the strap-hanger reasonably comfortable.⁶ Another quick and easy way of improving urban transportation in most cities would be to eliminate a mass of archaic regulations on the granting of public transit and taxi franchises. At present, the cities are in effect going out of their way to place obstacles in the paths of those who might offer the public better transportation.⁷ Metropolitan transportation could also easily be improved in those areas—there are a number of them—where extensive expressway networks link the downtown with outlying cities and towns. In these areas, according to the Harvard economist John F. Kain, "all that is currently needed to create extensive metropolitan rapid transit systems . . . is a limited outlay for instrumentation, some modification of ramp arrangement and design, and most importantly a policy decision to keep congestion at very low levels during peak hours and to provide priority access for public transit vehicles."⁸

The "price" of solving, or alleviating, some much-talked-about city problems, it would appear from this, may be largely political. Keeping congestion at low levels at peak hours would necessitate placing high toll charges on roads at the very times when most people want to use them; some would regard this as grossly unfair (as indeed in a way it would be) and so the probabilities are that if any official had the authority to make the decision (none does, which is part of the problem) he would not raise tolls at rush hours for fear of being voted out of office.

If the transportation problem is basically political, so is the revenue problem. A great part of the wealth of our country is in the cities. When a mayor says that his city is on the verge of bankruptcy, he means that when the time comes to run for reelection he wants to be able to claim credit for straightening out a mess that was left him by his predecessor. What he means when he says that his city *must* have state or federal aid to finance some improvements is (1) the taxpayers of the city (or some important group of them) would rather go without the improvement than pay for it themselves; or (2) although they would pay for it themselves if they had to, they would much prefer to have some other taxpayers pay for it. Rarely if ever does a mayor who

makes such a statement mean (1) that for the city to pay for the improvement would necessarily force some taxpayers into poverty; or (2) that the city could not raise the money even if it were willing to force some of its taxpayers into poverty. In short, the "revenue crisis" mainly reflects the fact that people hate to pay taxes and that they think that by crying poverty they can shift some of the bill to someone else.⁹

To some extent, also, the revenue problem of the cities arises from the way jurisdictional boundaries are drawn or, more precisely, from what are considered to be inequities resulting from the movement of taxable wealth from one side of a boundary line to another. When many large taxpayers move to the suburbs, the central city must tax those who remain at a higher rate if it is to maintain the same level of services. The "problem" in this case is not that the taxpayers who remain are absolutely unable to pay the increased taxes; rather, it is that they do not want to pay them and that they consider it unfair that they should have to pay more simply because other people have moved away. The simple and costless solution (in all but a political sense) would be to charge nonresidents for services that they receive from the city or, failing that, to redraw the boundary lines so that everyone in the metropolitan area would be taxed on the same basis. As the historian Kenneth T. Jackson points out, those central cities that are declining in numbers of residents and in wealth are doing so because their state legislatures will not permit them to enlarge their boundaries by annexations; even before the Civil War many large cities would have been surrounded by suburbs — and therefore suffering from the same revenue problem — if they had not been permitted to annex freely.¹⁰

That we have not yet been willing to pay the price of solving, or alleviating, such "problems" even when the price is a very small one suggests that they are not really critical. Indeed, one might say that, by definition, a critical problem is one that people *are* willing to pay a considerable price to have solved.

With regard to these problems for which solutions are at hand, we will know that a real crisis impends when we see the solutions actually being applied. The solution, that is, will be applied when — and only when — the inconvenience or other disadvantage of allowing the problem to continue unabated is judged to have become greater than

that of taking the necessary measures to abate it. In other words, a bad-but-not-quite-critical problem is one that it would almost-but-not-quite pay us to do something about.

If some real disaster impends in the city, it is not because parking spaces are hard to find, because architecture is bad, because department store sales are declining, or even because taxes are rising. If there is a genuine crisis, it has to do with the essential welfare of individuals or with the good health of the society, not merely with comfort, convenience, amenity, and business advantage, important as these are. It is not necessary here to try to define "essential welfare" rigorously: it is enough to say that whatever may cause people to die before their time, to suffer serious impairment of their health or of their powers, to waste their lives, to be deeply unhappy or happy in a way that is less than human affects their essential welfare. It is harder to indicate in a sentence or two what is meant by the "good health" of the society. The ability of the society to maintain itself as a going concern is certainly a primary consideration; so is its free and democratic character. In the last analysis, however, the quality of a society must be judged by its tendency to produce desirable human types; the healthy society, then, is one that not only stays alive but also moves in the direction of giving greater scope and expression to what is distinctively human. In general, of course, what serves the essential welfare of individuals also promotes the good health of the society; there are occasions, however, when the two goals conflict. In such cases, the essential welfare of individuals must be sacrificed for the good health of the society. This happens on a very large scale when there is a war, but it may happen at other times as well. The conditions about which we should be most concerned, therefore, are those that affect, or may affect, the good health of the society. If there is an urban crisis in any ultimate sense, it must be constituted of these conditions.

It is a good deal easier to say what matters are not serious (that is, do not affect either the essential welfare of individuals or the good health of the society) than it is to say what ones are. It is clear, however, that crime, poverty, ignorance, and racial (and other) injustices are among the most important of the general conditions affecting the essential welfare of individuals. It is plausible, too, to suppose that these conditions have a very direct bearing upon the good health of

the society, although in this connection other factors that are much harder to guess about — for example, the nature and strength of the consensual bonds that hold the society together — may be much more important. To begin with, anyway, it seems reasonable to look in these general directions for what may be called the serious problems of the cities.

It is clear at the outset that serious problems directly affect only a rather small minority of the whole urban population. In the relatively new residential suburbs and in the better residential neighborhoods in the outlying parts of the central cities and in the older, larger, suburbs, the overwhelming majority of people are safely above the poverty line, have at least a high school education, and do not suffer from racial discrimination. For something like two-thirds of all city dwellers, the urban problems that touch them directly have to do with comfort, convenience, amenity, and business advantage. In the terminology used here, such problems are "important" but not "serious." In many cases, they cannot even fairly be called important; a considerable part of the urban population — those who reside in the "nicer" suburbs — lives under material conditions that will be hard to improve upon.

The serious problems are to be found in all large cities and in most small ones. But they affect only parts of these cities — mainly the inner parts of the larger ones — and only a small proportion of the whole urban population. Crime is a partial exception, but in Chicago (so the Violence Commission was told) a person who lives in the inner city faces a yearly risk of 1 in 77 of being assaulted whereas for those who live in the better areas of the city the risk is only 1 in 2,000 and for those who live in the rich suburbs only 1 in 10,000.¹¹ Apart from those in the inner districts, which comprise about 10 to 20 percent of the city's total area, there are few serious urban problems. If what really matters is the essential welfare of individuals and the good health of the society, as opposed to comfort, convenience, amenity, and business advantage, then the problem is less an "urban" one than an "inner-(big)-city" one.

Although the poor and the black (and in some cities other minority groups also) are concentrated in the inner city and although the

districts in which they live include many blocks of unrelieved squalor, it should not be supposed that the "poverty areas" of the inner cities are uniformly black, poor, or squalid. This can be seen from the findings of a special survey made in 1970 and 1971 by the Census of what it defined as the "low-income areas" of fifty-one of the largest cities.¹² A brief listing of some of these findings should dispel any notion that an inner-city "poverty area" is occupied only by the "disinherited."

Of the almost nine million persons aged sixteen or over who were counted, half were black and 35 percent non-Spanish white.

More than three-fourths reported incomes *above* the poverty level. The median income of a male-headed family was \$7,782 (the comparable figure for the United States population as a whole was \$10,480).

Among such families, 25 percent of the white and 20 percent of the Negro reported incomes above \$12,000.

Of the nearly two million persons below the poverty level, whites and blacks were distributed in about the same proportion as in the whole "poverty area" population. (Spanish families were considerably overrepresented among the poor in the nineteen cities where they were numerous enough to be surveyed separately.)

The median income of male-headed white families was \$425 more than that of black and the median income of black \$849 more than Spanish.

In twenty-one of the fifty-one cities, however, the blacks in poverty areas had higher median family incomes than whites and in twelve more cities the difference (in favor of the whites) was trivial — less than 5 percent.

The median years of schooling for persons twenty-five years of age or older was almost identical — 10 and a small fraction — for whites and blacks, males and females; for persons twenty-five to thirty-four it was also almost identical and surprisingly high: twelve and a small fraction.

Although a large share of the income of many families went for housing, the reverse was also true: 40 percent of white and 25 percent of Negro (male-headed) families paid less than 10 percent of their income for housing. Ninety percent of the white and 80 percent of

the black (male-headed) families had housing that was not overcrowded — that is, there was at least one room per person.

Of the nearly nine million persons aged sixteen or over, 478,000 (9.6 percent of those in the labor force) were unemployed. Less than half of these had been laid off; most had either quit or were just entering the labor force. Only 82,000 had been unemployed for as long as six months. Most were teenagers or unattached men and women in their early twenties, and many of these were students who wanted part-time or summer jobs.

The unemployment rate among male Negro family heads was 5.3 percent; among male white (non-Spanish) family heads it was 4.5 percent.

About 10 percent of those *not* in the labor force said that they intended looking for a job (most non-participants were housewives, of course). Asked why they did not look, "inability to find work" was given as a reason by 8,000 males and 24,000 females. Of these, 25 percent were aged 16-21. Asked what would be their minimum acceptable wage, the median figure given by black males in this age group was \$83 weekly; whites expected one dollar more. Both black and white men who were heads of families expected \$108.

Within or overlapping, some "poverty areas" are huge enclaves — a few have populations of several hundred thousand — that are almost entirely Negro or, in some cities, Puerto Rican or Mexican-American.¹³ These enclaves — they are often called ghettos, but as will be explained in Chapter Four this usage is extremely ambiguous — constitute a problem that is both serious and unique to the large cities. The problem arises because the enclaves are psychologically — and in some degree physically — cut off from the rest of the city. Whatever may be the effect of this on the welfare of the individual — and it may possibly be trivial — it is clear that the existence of a large enclave of persons who perceive themselves, and are perceived by others, as having a separate identity, not sharing, or not sharing fully, the attachment that others feel to the "city," constitutes a potential hazard not only to present peace and order but — what is more important — to the well-being of the society over the long run. Problems of individual welfare may be no greater by virtue

of the fact that people live together in huge enclaves rather than in relative isolation on farms and in small towns, although about this one cannot be sure (such problems *appear* greater when people live in enclaves, of course, but this is because they are too conspicuous to be ignored). The problem that they may present to the good health of the society, however, is very different in kind and vastly greater in importance solely by virtue of their living in huge enclaves. Unlike those who live on farms and in small towns, disaffected people who are massed together may develop a collective consciousness and sense of identity. From some standpoints it may be highly desirable that they do so: feeling the strength of their numbers may give them confidence and encourage them to act politically and in other ways that will help them. On the other hand, the effect of numbers may be to support attitudes and institutions that will hamper progress. There is no doubt, however, that such enclaves represent a threat to peace and order, one made greater by the high proportion of young people in them. As the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future recently remarked,

The decade 1960 to 1970 saw a doubling of the number of young black men and women aged 15 to 24 in the metropolitan areas of every part of the nation except the south. This increase, twice that for comparable white youth, was the result of higher black fertility to begin with, participation in the post-World War II baby boom, and continued migration away from southern rural poverty. The result has been more and more young black people ill-equipped to cope with the demands of urban life, more likely to wind up unemployed or in dead-end, low-paying jobs, and caught in the vicious wheel of poverty, welfare, degradation, and crime.

The facts we have cited describe a crisis for our society. They add up to a demographic recipe for more turmoil in our cities, more bitterness among our "have-nots," and greater divisiveness among all of our peoples.¹⁴

The political danger in the presence of great concentrations of people who feel little attachment to the society has long been regarded by some as *the* serious problem of the cities — the one problem that might eventuate in disaster for the society. "The dark ghettos," Dr. Clark has written, "now represent a nuclear stockpile which can annihilate the very foundations of America."¹⁵ These words bring to mind the apprehensions that were expressed by some of the

