


ARTICLE

The Making of a Neocon

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James Q. Wilson (1931–2012) ranks among the most influential political scientists and policy intellectuals of the past fifty years. This new account of Wilson’s journey from liberal to conservative highlights his time at Harvard University in the 1960s, during the height of liberal authority and the emergence of the New Left, and draws from archival materials and records at MIT, Harvard, and RAND, and from a range of Wilson’s writings on administration, urban affairs, and crime. It situates Wilson in the organizational nexus in which he worked, analyzing his thinking as it shifted from a preoccupation with incentives and running organizations (“organizational maintenance”) to disincentives and punishing people (“order maintenance”). Wilson, the nation’s leading institutionalist, formed his conservative ideas in the praxis of university administration—a venue typically ignored by scholars but one that influenced his understanding of organizations and crime.

James Q. Wilson liked a good joke. We know this because he kept one for posterity’s sake, tucked away in his personal papers at the Pardee RAND Graduate School in Santa Monica, California. Dated January 7, 2004, the joke arrived in his university email account courtesy of Peter Clark, a fellow political scientist and occasional collaborator, whose friendship with Wilson dated to the 1950s and their graduate school days at the University of Chicago. The subject line was a single, possibly misspelled word—*Administratium*—that surely gave Wilson pause. But the message waiting inside must have made him laugh: “A major research institution today announced the discovery of the heaviest element yet known to science. This new element is tentatively named ‘administratium.’” Its molecular structure included “1 neutron, 12 assistant neutrons, 75 deputy neutrons, and 111 assistant deputy neutrons, giving it an atomic mass of 312 ... held together by a force called morons, which are surrounded by vast quantities of lepton-like particles called peons.” This element was believed to “impede every reaction” and exhibited recombinant powers that resulted in frequent “reorganization,” known as “moron promotion,” in which assistant, deputy, and assistant deputy neutrons switched places. Each successive reorganization increased administratium’s weight and, scientists speculated, the likelihood of it reaching an agitated state of “Critical Morass.” Whoever said conservatives weren’t any fun?¹

Wilson, who died in 2012 at age eighty, ranks among the most influential political scientists and policy intellectuals of the last fifty years. From his perch at Harvard, where he spent the formative decades of his career, he wrote on bureaucracy, urban affairs, crime, and culture for both academic and mainstream audiences.² The author, coauthor, or editor of some two

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¹Peter Clark to James Wilson, Jan. 7, 2004, folder 8, box 21, Papers of James Q. Wilson, RAND Corporation Archives, Pardee Rand Graduate School, Santa Monica, CA [hereafter PJQW].

²Elaine Woo, “James Q. Wilson Dies at 80,” *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 3, 2012, <https://www.latimes.com/local/obituaries/la-xpm-2012-mar-03-la-me-james-q-wilson-20120303-story.html> (accessed Aug. 25, 2022). Wilson

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dozen books, as well as hundreds of articles and essays, Wilson was a member of the American Philosophical Society, the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, and the American Enterprise Institute's Council of Academic Advisers; he even served as president of the American Political Science Association. He was a serial White House adviser, and he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom.³ That Wilson was an outspoken conservative—in a discipline (political science) and institution (the modern university) that were and remain liberal in the broadest sense—made his professional accomplishments even more remarkable.⁴

Wilson was not born a conservative; he became one. Along with his Harvard colleagues and friends—Seymour Martin Lipset, Nathan Glazer, Patrick Moynihan, Richard Herrnstein, Samuel Huntington, Edward Banfield, and Harvey Mansfield—Wilson belonged to a group of “new conservative” intellectuals who turned right in response to the cultural and political upheavals of the 1960s. According to the received interpretation, the neoconservatives, as this loose faction of dissident liberal (and ex-socialist) journalists and academics came to be known, entered the 1960s convinced that experts could engineer solutions to most social problems, until the unintended consequences of the Great Society, the arrival of the New Left, and the Vietnam War depleted their technocratic faith. Wilson had voted for Kennedy, Johnson, and Humphrey, and he backed the war on poverty, even a guaranteed income, before reversing course, emerging as an influential neoconservative thinker by the early 1970s. His analysis of the bureaucratic state and contribution to the punitive turn in American crime control remain pillars of right-wing opinion leadership to this day.⁵

The rise of the neoconservatives has been told many times before as a chapter in the history of New York City's Jewish literary scene of the 1960s. This account has centered on the two flagship neoconservative journals, *The Public Interest* and *Commentary*, their respective charismatic editors, Irving Kristol and Norman Podhoretz, and the group of regular contributors, including Wilson, a California Catholic, who joined their cause.⁶ While there can be no doubt as to Kristol's and Podhoretz's cultivation of the deep skepticism at the heart of the

taught at the University of Chicago (1959–1961), Harvard University (1961–1987), University of California, Los Angeles (1987–1997), and Pepperdine University (1998–2008).

³“Personal Data Statement,” Nov. 19, 2001, provided to author via email correspondence from RAND Corporation Archives, Apr. 22, 2014.

⁴Everett Carl Ladd, Jr. and Seymour Martin Lipset, “The Politics of American Political Scientists,” *PS* 4, no. 2 (Spring 1971): 135–44; Everett Carl Ladd, Jr. and Seymour Martin Lipset, *The Divided Academy: Professors and Politics* (New York, 1975); Louis Menand, *The Marketplace of Ideas: Reform and Resistance in the American University* (New York, 2010), 127–56; Neil Gross, *Why Are Professors Liberal and Why Do Conservatives Care?* (Cambridge, MA, 2013), 104–40. Gross's study persuasively traces the liberal professoriate and academy to the compounding effects of “political self-selection based on occupational reputation.” Gross, *Why Are Professors Liberal?*, 103.

⁵James Q. Wilson, “The War on Cities,” *Public Interest* 3 (Spring 1966): 27–44, here 40; Hubert Humphrey to James Wilson, May 31, 1968, folder 3, box 9, PJQW; James Q. Wilson, “A Life in the Public Interest,” *Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 21, 2009, A19; Tevi Troy, “The Mind in the Oval Office,” *American Enterprise Institute*, Mar. 2, 2012, <https://www.aei.org/articles/the-mind-in-the-oval-office/> (accessed Aug. 25, 2022).

⁶For this version of events, see Peter Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives: The Origins of a Movement* (1979; New York, 2013), 4–7, 44–6, 49; Sidney Blumenthal, *The Rise of the Counter-Establishment: From Conservative Ideology to Political Power* (New York, 1986), 149–50; E. J. Dionne, Jr., *Why Americans Hate Politics* (New York, 1991), 55–76; Irving Kristol, “An Autobiographical Memoir,” in *Neoconservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea* (New York, 1995), 3–40; Mark Gerson, *The Neoconservative Vision: From the Cold War to the Culture Wars* (Lanham, MD, 1997), 4–5, 73–142; Jacob Heilbrunn, *They Knew They Were Right: The Rise of the Neocons* (New York, 2008), 23–64; Justin Vaisse, *Neoconservatism: The Biography of a Movement* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), 7–8, 50–80; Benjamin Balint, *Running Commentary: The Contentious Magazine that Transformed the Jewish Left into the Neoconservative Right* (New York, 2010); Jean-François Drolet, *American Neoconservatism: The Politics and Culture of a Reactionary Idealism* (New York, 2011), 19–51; Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, 2015), 38–69; Daniel Geary, *Beyond Civil Rights: The Moynihan Report and Its Legacy* (Philadelphia, 2015), 186–7; and Antti Lepistö, *The Rise of Common-Sense Conservatism: The American Right and the Reinvention of the*

neoconservative imagination—a skepticism of ideology and government action and of the liberal metaphysics of malleable personhood on which those projects depended—to understand Wilson’s personal journey from liberal to neocon requires considering factors that lay beyond the orbit of the New York intellectuals. For the past fifty years, historians of the neoconservative movement, from Peter Steinfels to Justin Vaïsse, have characterized it as the “intelligent conservatism America lacked,” guided by a singular “conviction: in domestic and foreign policy, ideas matter.”⁷ If this is true, then it is worth considering some alternative approaches to how a prominent first-generation neoconservative thinker like Wilson worked out some of the ideas that mattered to him most.⁸

Here I engage one of Wilson’s core intellectual interests, as he put it in 1961, “to bridge the gap between the study of individual behavior and the study of organizational behavior.”⁹ Drawing on archival materials and records from Harvard, MIT, and RAND, and from his contemporaneous scholarship and writings, I place Wilson in the urban university milieu in which he worked during the tumultuous 1960s, the height of liberal authority, and the rise of the New Left. This new focus reveals how Wilson’s everyday experiences *within* organizations shaped his thinking *about* organizations, shifting it from a preoccupation with incentives and running organizations (“organizational maintenance”) to disincentives and disciplining and punishing people (“order maintenance”). It turns out that the nation’s leading institutionalist tried out some of his ideas in the praxis of university administration—a venue typically ignored by scholars but one that influenced Wilson’s evolving understanding of organizations and crime. Indeed, in the development of rightwing thought, the modern university functioned as a crucial site for learning and experimentation.¹⁰

The story examines Wilson at work in three organizational spaces. Part I, “Center,” covers Wilson’s arrival to Harvard as a new assistant professor of government in 1961, and his three-year stint as the director of the Joint Center for Urban Studies of MIT and Harvard University. Part II, “Committee,” turns to Wilson’s role during the campus wars of the late 1960s: first, as chairperson

Scottish Enlightenment (Chicago, 2021), 9, 25–32, 69, 71–6. On Kristol and Podhoretz, see also Gary Dorrien, *The Neoconservative Mind: Politics, Culture, and the War of Ideology* (Philadelphia, 1993).

⁷Steinfels, *Neoconservatives*, xiv; Vaïsse, *Neoconservatism*, 13.

⁸The story of Wilson’s intellectual development in the 1960s has not been told. On his influence in the 1980s and 1990s, with specific reference to how his ideas were influenced by the Scottish Enlightenment tradition, see Lepistö, *Rise of Common-Sense Conservatism*, 56–68, 136–55.

⁹Peter B. Clark and James Q. Wilson, “Incentive Systems: A Theory of Organizations,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (Sept. 1961): 129–66, here 131.

¹⁰The study of conservatism and right-wing politics has emerged as a rich subfield of U.S. history, with the modern university as a key institutional setting. For several founding texts in this literature, see William F. Buckley, Jr., *God and Man at Yale: The Superstitions of Academic Freedom* (Chicago, 1951); and George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in American since 1945* (New York, 1976), 212–3, 468–81. On the free market, see Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA, 2009); and Angus Burgin, *The Great Persuasion: Reinventing Free Markets since the Depression* (Cambridge, MA, 2012). On academic freedom and attacks on scientific expertise, see Ellen W. Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York, 1986); and Andrew Jewett, *Science under Fire: Challenges to Scientific Authority in Modern America* (Cambridge, MA, 2020), 138–55, 204–28. On the academic profession, see Steven M. Teles, *The Rise of the Conservative Legal Movement: The Battle for Control of the Law* (Princeton, NJ, 2008); and Jon A. Shields and Joshua A. Dunn, Sr., *Passing on the Right: Conservative Professors in the Progressive University* (New York, 2016). On evangelical colleges, see Adam Laats, *Fundamentalist U: Keeping the Faith in American Higher Education* (New York, 2018). On students, see John A. Andrew, *The Other Side of the Sixties: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of Conservative Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1997); Gregory L. Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of the Contemporary Right* (New York, 1999); Rebecca E. Klatch, *A Generation Divided: The New Left, the New Right, and the 1960s* (Berkeley, CA, 1999); Amy J. Binder and Kate Wood, *Becoming Right: How Campuses Shape Young Conservatives* (Princeton, NJ, 2013); and Julian Nemeth, “The Passion of William F. Buckley: Academic Freedom, Conspiratorial Conservatism, and the Rise of the Postwar Right,” *Journal of American Studies* 54, no. 2 (May 2020): 323–50.

of the Committee on the University and the City, in 1968, whose report captured Harvard's impact on urban blight and its role in radicalizing students; next, as a member of the conservative faculty caucus; and then, as head of the emergency disciplinary committee created to punish the student radicals. Part III, "Department," covers the student radicals' response to Wilson's search for punitive justice and the toll it took on him and his friends during his fraught chairpersonship of the department of government in the early 1970s, where this account ends.

By following Wilson inside the organizational nexus in which he worked—from center to committee to department—this article complements and challenges the existing history of the neoconservatives by showing how Wilson became self-conscious of the limits of social knowledge and learned to appreciate the benefits of punishing people instead. It provides a fresh take on the politics of knowledge in the modern university. Unlike most studies of faculty that exclusively focus on departmental life and the generation of disciplinary knowledge, this work also explores "organized research units" and the "interstitial academy," what sociologist Mitchell Stevens and his collaborators call "not-departments"—the off-the-radar spaces in the university organization chart where politics and policy communities are institutionalized and budding policy experts like Wilson sometimes hung his hat.¹¹ Well before the New Left emerged on campus, centers such as the Joint Center emerged first, and politicized campuses when they did. Shortly after taking over, Wilson discovered that not everyone, himself included, agreed with the Joint Center's diagnoses and prescriptions for urban rehabilitation, and that even the most scrupulous research often crumbled under the weight of powerful personal beliefs and partisan political ideologies.¹²

This work also expands the definition of academic labor by placing Wilson's administrative responsibilities front and center. Few studies of the modern university have taken the role of workaday administration seriously, while fewer still have attempted to link administrative tasks to the generation of ideas.¹³ There is a good reason for this. Most scholars view administration as a necessary evil at best, and the antithesis of a true "life of the mind" at worst.¹⁴ Not Wilson. He found the study of organizations and individuals too puzzling to contemplate in monkish solitude. So, he pursued a hands-on research method, turning committee assignments and administrative tasks into natural experiments to try out his theories of organizational maintenance and the maintenance of order from inside the bureaucratic belly of the modern university.

Throughout Wilson's career, organizations, from the utterly impersonal to the deeply intimate, served as a key unit of his analysis because he believed they represented the fundamental building blocks of the social world (Figure 1). Public, private, and voluntary organizations, including universities, energized people and groups, but like the elements of the periodic table, without the proper attention and care, any organization could become radicalized under pressure, or worse, reach a state of "critical morass." Ultimately, Wilson came to believe that well-designed organizations could guide, if not remake, behavior, and that consequences

¹¹On the "interstitial academy," see Joel Isaac, *Working Knowledge: Making the Human Sciences from Parsons to Kuhn* (Cambridge, MA, 2012). On "not-departments," see Mitchell L. Stevens, Cynthia Miller-Idriss, and Seteney Shami, *Seeing the World: How U.S. Universities Make Knowledge in a Global Era* (Princeton, NJ, 2018); and on "organized research units," see Ethan Schrum, *The Instrumental University: Education in Service of the National Agenda after World War II* (Ithaca, NY, 2019).

¹²On the center model, a core if underexamined professional milieu, see Harold Orlans, *The Nonprofit Research Institute: Its Origins, Operation, Problems, and Prospects* (New York, 1972); Roger L. Geiger, "Organized Research Units—Their Role in the Development of University Research," *Journal of Higher Education* 61, no. 1 (Jan.–Feb. 1990): 1–19; and Joy Rohde, *Armed with Expertise: The Militarization of American Social Research during the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY, 2013). For a criticism of centers and institutes, see Robert A. Nisbet, *The Degradation of the Academic Dogma* (1971; New York, 1997), 71–87.

¹³For one helpful exception, see Hunter Crowther-Heyck, *Herbert A. Simon: The Bounds of Reason in Modern America* (Baltimore, 2005), 75–119.

¹⁴For the organizational origins of this tension, see Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago, 1965), 263–444.



Figure 1. James Q. Wilson, ca. 1970, facing the Littauer Center of Public Administration, home of the department of government, with Harvard College to his back (UAV 605.295.7, box 3, Harvard University Archives, Cambridge, MA).

for violating what he, his colleagues, and millions of Americans had taken for granted as ingrained behavioral norms were sometimes needed to maintain order. Wilson gleaned this conception of organizational life at Harvard University in the 1960s.

Part I. Center

Wilson and his wife, Roberta, moved to Cambridge in 1961. Barely thirty years old but already a star, Wilson decided to leave the University of Chicago for a position in Harvard's department of government, not only because it was Harvard, and the department had the country's leading collection of institutionalists, but also because it meant reuniting with his dissertation advisor and friend, Edward Banfield, a leading urban affairs scholar and early exponent of "culture of poverty" theories that linked privation to familial dysfunction. As an added benefit, Wilson would be joining Banfield and dozens of other colleagues at the pathbreaking Joint Center for Urban Studies of MIT and Harvard University, opened in 1959 with a major grant from the Ford Foundation.¹⁵

The Joint Center was one of several dozen centers and institutes to emerge in Cambridge during the Cold War—indeed, that had been created to help fight the Cold War. Harvard's network of area studies' centers covered Russia, East Asia, the Middle East, and International Affairs; MIT, meanwhile, focused on science and engineering, anchored by the massive Lincoln Laboratory and its hundreds of scientists, the Instrumentation Laboratory, the Operations Evaluation Group, and their many spinoffs.¹⁶ These centers varied in size and significance but shared a number of features: experts from multiple fields, turf away from the

¹⁵Morton Keller and Phyllis Keller, *Making Harvard Modern: The Rise of America's University* (New York, 2001), 226; Edward C. Banfield and Laura Fasano Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (Glencoe, IL, 1958).

¹⁶Keller and Keller, *Making Harvard Modern*, 227–8; James R. Killian, Jr., "Report of the President," *MIT Bulletin* 85, no.1 (Oct. 1949), 7–29, here 21; J. A. Stratton, "Report of the President," *MIT Bulletin* 95, no. 2 (Nov. 1959), 1–53, here 17–27.

departmental disciplines, extramural funding, and, most importantly, a problem in need of a solution. By the time Wilson arrived, the Joint Center had already established itself as the nation's leading site for multidisciplinary social scientific research on the problem of the urban crisis.¹⁷

Located off Harvard Square at 66 Church Street, the Joint Center quickly became Wilson's intellectual home away from his home department. Shortly after earning tenure in 1963, he was handpicked by presidents Nathan Pusey of Harvard and Julius Stratton of MIT as the Joint Center's next director. His youthful energy and widely respected expertise on city politics, including on Black political mobilizing and leadership, made him the perfect fit at a time when the Joint Center was preparing to embark on a local research agenda to make "more extensive use of Boston experiences for empirical studies."¹⁸

Running any center was hard work, but the Joint Center doubly so. Its complex interinstitutional structure would have Wilson answering to two universities, two presidents, and two separate governing committees, as well as managing 100 faculty affiliates, researchers, visiting associates, doctoral fellows, and staff.¹⁹ There would be meetings to chair, conferences to host, and an academic press to oversee. He called the Joint Center a "two-headed monster" but took the job anyway and used it as an opportunity to try out his theory of "organizational maintenance"—the real and symbolic stuff that organizations meted out to survive.²⁰

The study of organizational maintenance was central to Wilson's intellectual life. He wanted to understand why some organizations persisted while others died, and thought incentives were key. He and coauthor Peter Clark originally diagrammed the theory in "Incentive Systems: A Theory of Organizations," published in *Administrative Science Quarterly* in 1961, in which they posited three organizational types distinguished by three types of incentives: material (i.e., jobs and money), purposive (i.e., the passing of a law or the enactment of a specific practice), and solidary (i.e., group membership, status, and prestige). The young duo's paper built on the trailblazing work of administrative scientists Chester Barnard and Herbert Simon—identifying the individual as the "basic strategic factor in organizations" and leaders' strategic distribution of incentives as the glue that kept organizations together—but also sought to transcend it. Namely, Wilson and Clark's paper offered the most developed incentive system to date, complete with detailed definitions, and included numerous illustrative cases beyond executive decision making in vertically integrated administrative agencies, the field's traditional unit of analysis. All of this was in service to their principal claim: incentives shaped the growth of "all formal organizations," whatever their size or function, be they public, private, or voluntary in orientation.²¹

¹⁷On the Joint Center's founding, see Eugénie L. Birch, "Making Urban Research Intellectually Respectable: Martin Meyerson and the Joint Center for Urban Studies of Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University, 1959–1964," *Journal of Planning History* 10, no. 3 (Aug. 2011): 219–38; and Christopher P. Loss, "'The City of Tomorrow Must Reckon with the Lives and Living Habits of Human Beings': The Joint Center for Urban Studies Goes to Venezuela, 1957–69," *Journal of Urban History* 47, no. 3 (May 2021): 623–50. On Wilson's role, see Christopher Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin* (Chicago, 2011), 179–80.

¹⁸A Proposal to the Ford Foundation, Jan. 1962, folder 1/3: JCUS 1957-1964, box 73, Administrative Collection 134 [hereafter AC], MIT Institute Archives, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA [hereafter IA], 9–10.

¹⁹Joint Center for Urban Studies (JCUS), *The First Five Years, 1959 to 1964* (Cambridge, MA, 1964), 5–6, 57–70.

²⁰Mary L. Wissler, "Building Cities, Bridging Gaps," *Harvard Crimson*, May 12, 1965, <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1965/5/12/building-cities-bridging-gaps-pacross-the/> (accessed Aug. 25, 2022). All *Crimson* articles are available online at <https://www.thecrimson.com/> (accessed Aug. 25, 2022) [hereafter *Crimson*].

²¹Clark and Wilson, "Incentive Systems," 130, 132–49. The Political Organizations and Parties Section of the American Political Science Association awarded the article the 1992 Jack Walker Award "for an article of unusual importance and significance to the field"; see folder 3, box 8, PJQW. See also Chester I. Barnard, *The Functions of the Executive* (Cambridge, MA, 1938); Herbert A. Simon, *Administrative Behavior: A Study of Decision-Making*

Personally, Wilson was committed to exploring the role of incentives in the maintenance of political organizations and on the policy-making process more generally. This was the thrust of his own scholarship in the early 1960s: first, in *Negro Politics* (1960), his dissertation-turned-book on Black politics in Chicago's South Side; next, in *The Amateur Democrat* (1962), on insurgent citizen lobbies in California; and, a year later, in *City Politics* (1963), his most forceful explication of the use of incentives in the maintenance of political organizations and policy implementation. Coauthored with Edward Banfield, *City Politics* argued that urban administration and politics were "concretely indistinguishable" parts of the same process and that government "goods and services" were really just incentives used by leaders to "manag[e] conflict" between and among the competing interests that comprised America's rambunctious pluralist political order.²² "All that is necessary in public policy," reflected Wilson, decades later, on his thinking at the time, "is to arrange the incentives confronting voters ... so they will behave in a socially optimal way."²³

Initially, the voluntary organization where he worked—the modern university—figured sparingly in his research on organizations despite his belief that it played an outsized role in shaping society. The university was not a political organization, that was for sure. Its members were not motivated by naked self-interest or grandiose causes, or so Wilson believed. When pressed, he categorized the university as a solidary organization driven by *esprit de corps* and the quest for professional eminence. In fact, Wilson did not really regard the university as an organization at all, at least not as he understood them, since its hyper-individualized structure made it virtually structureless—a non-organization where "generalizing liberal intellectuals" like himself could think and do whatever they wanted, following the facts with impunity wherever they led.²⁴ Wilson's understanding of the university and the Joint Center as a meeting space for individual experts dedicated to objective, value-free research instantiated the prevailing scientism of the day. As he put it in an interview with the *Crimson*, "The Joint Center as a whole, of course, doesn't have any values, any more than Harvard as a whole has values." Although the Joint Center defied "every theory of administration [he had] ever read," the absence of ideological agendas and political meddling persuaded him that when it came to the organizational maintenance of the Joint Center, all he needed to do was line up the right experts, buffer them from outside interference, and let them do the rest.²⁵

Wilson spent the first year shoring up and expanding the Joint Center's research and financial portfolios, in both cases deploying intermediary agents to protect his fellow experts from potential conflicts of interest. He drafted a plan for the Boston Studies Program to provide

Processes in Administrative Organizations (1945; New York, 1976); and James G. March, Herbert A. Simon, and Harold Guetzkow, *Organizations* (New York, 1958). Barnard, for instance, was more interested in *organization* (i.e., "cooperation") than plumbing the mechanics of different *organizations*; and Simon on the connection between choice and control; while Wilson studied incentives as a way to overcome group conflict. On Simon and Barnard, see Crowther-Heyck, *Herbert A. Simon*, 96–139.

²²James Q. Wilson, *Negro Politics: The Search for Leadership* (Glencoe, IL 1960), 34–7; James Q. Wilson, *The Amateur Democrat: Club Politics in Three Cities* (Chicago, 1962), 226–57; Edward C. Banfield and James Q. Wilson, *City Politics* (Cambridge, MA, 1963), 18–9, 27–32. For his most detailed discussion of incentives, see James Q. Wilson, *Political Organizations* (1974; Princeton, NJ, 1995), 30–55.

²³On policy as incentives, see James Q. Wilson, "The Rediscovery of Character: Private Virtue and Public Policy," *Public Interest* 81 (Fall 1985): 3–16, here 4. See also Elizabeth Popp Berman, *Thinking Like an Economist: How Efficiency Replaced Equality in U.S. Public Policy* (Princeton, NJ, 2022), 98–128.

²⁴James Wilson interview by David M. Austin, Oct. 29, 1965, transcript, folder 3, box 3, PJQW, 14. Wilson was torn about how to treat the university as an organizational structure. He only mentioned the "university" twice in "Incentive Systems," on pages 137 and 142, and abandoned it as a case in his subsequent scholarly work. On the neoconservative vision of the modern university, see Hartman, *War for the Soul of America*, 55–6.

²⁵Wissler, "Building Cities, Bridging Gaps." On scientism, see Mark Solovey, *Shaky Foundations: The Politics-Patronage-Social Science Nexus in Cold War America* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2013), 1–19; and Jewett, *Science under Fire*, 85–6.

fee-for-service “advice and assistance” to local government agencies and businesses, per Pusey and Stratton’s request.²⁶ Eli Goldston, president of Eastern Gas and Fuel, signed on as the infant program’s “liaison officer.” As a successful businessman and three-time Harvard graduate, Goldston was equipped to navigate the fine line between the “world of scholarship and the world of hard, political and economic realities” that the Joint Center occupied. Wilson told Stratton that Goldston’s deep understanding of the “functions and limitations of university research” would ensure a steady stream of new opportunities and prevent any relationships that might sully the Joint Center’s reputation as a locus of neutral expertise.²⁷

Wilson also installed an intermediary to streamline the Joint Center’s fundraising operation. For this role, he chose Gerald Blakeley, president of Cabot, Cabot & Forbes, among New England’s biggest developers, specializing in mixed-use constructions and business parks. Blakeley offered access to the chummy real estate community, whose financial backing, noted Wilson, was necessary to “sustain the independence and intellectual vitality of the Joint Center.” Indeed, Wilson believed that his mediated administrative approach would safeguard free inquiry on the “difficult problems we face in dealing with urban development”—and keep the two-headed monster at bay.²⁸

Shortly after these organizational innovations were in place, the Joint Center came under assault. Ironically, neither an ill-gotten gift nor a contract research project gone awry were the cause—but a book about urban renewal written by an obscure twenty-eight-year-old business professor named Martin Anderson, of Columbia University. Anderson’s ties to the Joint Center dated back to the 1961–1962 academic year, when he was an MIT doctoral student and research fellow at the Joint Center.²⁹ The dissertation-turned-book that he revised while in residence, *The Federal Bulldozer: A Critical Analysis of Urban Renewal*, published in 1964 under the Joint Center’s imprint, set in motion a series of fights that would shake Wilson’s belief in his administrative skills and in the mission of the center he was trying to run.

Anderson’s study marshaled the government’s own statistical data on the supposed “benefits of urban renewal” in order to expose the real “cost and consequences” of the program.³⁰ Based on his examination of the data, none of the program’s espoused aims were achieved in its first fifteen years of operation—not better housing for poor people, not more business activity in the downtown area, not increased tax revenues for cash-strapped cities, and certainly not justice for the 1.6 million people turned out of their homes by the program. He declared the program an unmitigated “fiasco”—a \$1 billion federal boondoggle that should be shut down.³¹ He concluded, “No new projects should be authorized; the program should be phased out by completing, as soon as possible, all current projects. The federal urban renewal program conceived in 1949 had admirable goals. Unfortunately, it has not and cannot achieve them. Only free enterprise can.”³²

The book’s brazen celebration of the natural market enraged virtually all the Joint Center’s key constituents: from the government agencies that administered urban renewal, to the real estate developers who profited from it, to the social service warriors who fought for public

²⁶James Wilson to Carl F. Floe, Oct. 15, 1963, folder 1/3: JCUS 1957–1964, box 73, AC 134, IA. The attached proposal, “Urban Studies in the Boston Region,” had been developed with MIT professor Lloyd Rodwin, chair of faculty committee at the Joint Center. On the approval of the Boston Studies Program, see Lloyd Rodwin to J. A. Stratton, Mar. 17, 1964, folder 1/3: JCUS 1957–1964, box 73, AC 134, IA.

²⁷James Wilson to J. A. Stratton, Sept. 2, 1965, folder: JCUS 1/65-6/66, box 72, AC 134, IA; Fred Pillsbury, “Joint Center for Urban Studies Plays Gadfly Role in Planning,” *Boston Globe*, Apr. 30, 1967, A2.

²⁸James Wilson to J. A. Stratton, July 16, 1964, folder 1/3: JCUS 1957–1964, box 73, AC 134, IA.

²⁹JCUS, *First Five Years*, 61.

³⁰Martin Anderson, *The Federal Bulldozer: A Critical Analysis of Urban Renewal, 1949–1962* (Cambridge, MA, 1964), 14.

³¹Anderson, *Federal Bulldozer*, 3, 21; Martin Anderson, “Thinking Ahead: Fiasco of Urban Renewal,” *Harvard Business Review* 43, no. 1 (Jan.–Feb. 1965): 6–7, 9–10, 12, 14, 16, 160–2.

³²Anderson, *Federal Bulldozer*, 230.

housing, to the urban studies community who thought Anderson's polemic a bridge too far.³³ Initially, Wilson was unconcerned. He stood behind the Joint Center's peer-review process and defended Anderson's right to his own interpretation of the facts.³⁴ Moreover, Anderson was at Columbia and unconnected to the Joint Center when the book was released. By all accounts, the Joint Center's standing as a vessel for nonpartisan research remained secure.

It would have remained that way, too, except Wilson, the former college debate champion, needed the situation with the publication of "Urban Renewal Does Not Always Renew," in *Harvard Today*, an alumni glossy, in January 1965. Wilson mentioned Anderson's book by name and defended his larger argument that urban renewal, as presently focused on superhighways, housing, and mixed-use spaces, that is, on the physical space of the city, would only disappoint. Wilson insisted that the real problems of the city were far more vexing to solve because they concerned people not things. Poverty, racial strife, crime, and cultural decay, Wilson maintained, were the actual culprits, and "they are not problems of the cities themselves, and they are not problems of the housing in these cities. They are problems of the people in those cities."³⁵

Wilson would vigorously pursue this claim over the next several years as his thinking veered away from organizational imperatives to the unpredictability and capriciousness of individuals. During the spring and summer of 1965, however, his argument was turned against him by opponents who received it as a blanket endorsement of Anderson's book and thus a repudiation of the Joint Center itself.

Dr. Robert C. Weaver, head of the U.S. Housing and Home Finance Agency and responsible for the administration of the government's urban renewal program, struck first.³⁶ The occasion was Harvard's prestigious E. L. Godkin Lecture, held at Memorial Hall, which Weaver had been invited to deliver and which he used to defend the program and embarrass Wilson in front of his friends and colleagues. The event was, from the start, "less tranquilly academic" than usual.³⁷ Local antirenewal activists organized protests beforehand, and hecklers jeered Weaver on and off during his address on the dilemmas of urban America. Weaver, the highest ranked Black administrator in the federal government, and the first Black person to give the Godkin keynote, was accustomed to extra attention and unafraid to face it head-on. In a nod to the protesters who had greeted him earlier, he agreed that some renewal projects, including some in the Boston metropolitan area, had been overly "disruptive" and caused poor people undue "psychological trauma." But, overall, urban redevelopment had been far more successful than its critics allowed, and he contended that new "human oriented" redevelopment legislation, then winding through Congress, which took seriously the plight of poor people affected by renewal, was poised to improve it.³⁸

Several of the critics Weaver had in mind had close ties to the Joint Center. Martin Anderson, whose book Weaver said was filled with "detailed distortions" and scarcely worth

³³On the book's critical reception, see Edward P. Eichler, review of *The Federal Bulldozer: A Critical Analysis of Urban Renewal, 1949–1962*, by Martin Anderson, *Stanford Law Review* 18, no. 2 (Nov. 1965): 280–5; Frank S. Kristof, "Challenges: Critical View of Urban Renewal," *Savings Bank Journal* 46, no. 2 (Apr. 1965): 36–9; Herbert J. Gans, "The Failure of Urban Renewal: A Critique and Some Proposals," *Commentary* 39, no. 4 (Apr. 1965): 29–37; and "Fiction, Heresy and Housing," *Wall Street Journal*, Mar. 5, 1965, 12.

³⁴Anderson, *Federal Bulldozer*, xi.

³⁵James Q. Wilson, "Urban Renewal Does Not Always Renew," *Harvard Today*, Jan. 1965, 2–8, here 3.

³⁶In 1965, the agency was succeeded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, with Weaver as Secretary.

³⁷Harvard University, *Report of the President of Harvard College and Reports of Departments, 1964–65* (Cambridge, MA, 1966), 389, <https://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.arch:15008> (accessed Aug. 25, 2022). All reports are available online.

³⁸Ben A. Franklin, "Weaver Asserts Disdain for the Poor Hinders Urban Renewal," *New York Times*, Apr. 4, 1965, 79; F. B. Taylor, Jr., "Renewal Saves Cities, No Slum End—Weaver," *Boston Globe*, Mar. 31, 1965, 7; Mary L. Wissler, "Weaver Foresees New Direction in Urban Redevelopment Policy," *Crimson*, Mar. 31, 1965. The legislation was the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965, Public Law No. 89-117, 79 Stat. 451 (1965).

mentioning, was one; Wilson, who was in attendance that night, another. Naming him no less than six times, Weaver categorically dismissed Wilson's claim that "there is no 'urban problem'" as academic nonsense contradicted by the Joint Center's—and Wilson's—work. "If one took Mr. Wilson's original statement literally," chided Weaver, "one might well ask why, then, is there a center for the study of a problem that does not exist."³⁹

Next, word of the Godkin dust-up preceded Wilson's arrival to the U.S. Capitol.⁴⁰ Wilson had been called by the House Subcommittee on Housing as an expert witness on the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965, mentioned by Weaver in Cambridge. Wilson considered the bill a "sound and desirable piece of legislation," particularly its commitment to tackling the human sources of the urban crisis that had begun to preoccupy him.⁴¹

When Wilson finished his prepared comments, the discussion abruptly veered to the Joint Center, *The Federal Bulldozer*, and Weaver. Republican Congressman William Widnall of New Jersey asked Wilson to respond to Weaver's claim that the Joint Center did shoddy work and that it "really ought to close up shop." Wilson demurred: Anderson's book had been thoroughly vetted, and while some readers remained unpersuaded by his conclusions, no one disputed "the major factual assertions of the book." As for the Godkin contretemps, Wilson said Weaver had taken his statement about no urban problems "out of context," and been disingenuous when he did. Weaver was a member of the Joint Center's board, reminded Wilson, and "Dr. Weaver in describing the past problems of the [urban renewal] program, associated himself with virtually every one of the objections that had been raised to it by people at the joint center." Not the Joint Center per se, which did not really exist, but the researchers who worked there—the people. In a rhetorical sleight-of-hand reminiscent of his claim that cities do not have problems, people do, Wilson told Widnall: "Our center itself ... has no findings."⁴²

The final indignity occurred several weeks later, this time hitting Wilson's pocketbook. One of Gerald Blakeley's donors, Lewis Kitchen, president of the Lewis Kitchen Realty Company of Kansas City, who had made much of his considerable fortune from federal redevelopment projects, sent word to Cambridge that he was rescinding a planned gift. Kitchen was irate about the publication of *The Federal Bulldozer* and the Joint Center's "promotional backing." The book, fumed Kitchen, met "only the minimum standards of scholarship and ... the author has twisted facts, used out of date and incomplete statistics, has lifted quotations out of context and ... ignored readily available material that shows him wrong." In short, it was an "irresponsible work" filled with "errors of facts," and Kitchen thought it foolish "to look to [him] for any financial support."⁴³

The written rebuff left Wilson "most distressed," and he met with Blakeley to right the situation. Wilson contemplated flying to Kansas City before deciding to write Kitchen a letter to clear up "certain misunderstandings" concerning the difference between the Joint Center, which did not have any views, and the occasionally "extreme views" of the researchers who worked there. Wilson explained that Anderson's book represented one of a "broad range" of views on urban renewal held by the Joint Center's scholars—not the only view. To give

³⁹Robert C. Weaver, *Dilemmas of Urban America* (Cambridge, MA, 1965), 40–1. See also Klemek, *Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal*, 179–80.

⁴⁰Franklin, "Weaver Asserts Disdain for the Poor Hinders Urban Renewal," 79.

⁴¹U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Housing of the Committee on Banking and Currency, *Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965: Part 2*, 89 Cong., 1st sess., Apr. 5, 1965, 813.

⁴²Subcommittee on Housing of the Committee on Banking and Currency, *Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965: Part 2*, 822–3. For Weaver's views, see Robert C. Weaver, *The Urban Complex: Human Values in Urban Life* (Garden City, NY, 1964).

⁴³Lewis Kitchen to Gerald Blakeley, Feb. 23, 1965, folder: JCUS 1/65-6/66, box 72, AC 134, IA; Lewis Kitchen to Vincent A. Fulmer, May 28, 1965, folder: JCUS 1/65-6/66, box 72, AC 134, IA. Fulmer, vice president and secretary of MIT, assisted with fundraising and the work of MIT's assortment of visiting committees, including that of the Joint Center.

Kitchen a better sense of the mix of views on urban affairs circulating at the Joint Center, Wilson suggested some additional reading by other affiliated scholars, including Raymond Vernon's *The Myth and Reality of Our Urban Problems* and Bernard Frieden's *The Future of Old Neighborhoods*; he also enclosed a hard copy of his recent congressional testimony for Kitchen's consideration.⁴⁴ Kitchen, unimpressed, wrote back: "After reading the letter and the statement before the House, I would doubt if our points of view could be reconciled." There would be no gift.⁴⁵

Having for months been buffeted by cranky politicians and amateur social theorists for defending *The Federal Bulldozer*, Wilson was ready to move on. In the fall of 1965, his spirits lifted when the Ford Foundation awarded a new multiyear grant to the Joint Center. He received the good news as "a vote of confidence" in the Harvard–MIT partnership, in the development of the field of urban studies, and, not least, in his own directorship.⁴⁶

His spirits soon sagged. The beginning of the end of Wilson's directorship started with a research request. Owen Kiernan, Massachusetts' commissioner of education, contacted Eli Goldston, the Joint Center's local liaison, requesting some "advice and assistance" to help integrate Boston's notoriously racist—and racially imbalanced—public schools. A federal investigation had found that 90 percent of the city's small Black student population attended majority-Black schools, violating the state's Racial Imbalance Act—and likely the Civil Rights Act too. Anticipating that the all-white Boston School Committee would drag its feet, even if it meant sacrificing \$4 million in state and federal aid, Kiernan turned to the Joint Center. Maybe the School Committee would be more responsive to Harvard and MIT professors than to self-interested government bureaucrats armed with an integrationist agenda.⁴⁷

Wilson appointed a six-person Technical Assistance Team to find out. The team worked around the clock during the 1965–1966 school year gathering and feeding reams of census, housing, tax, and school placement data into an IBM mainframe.⁴⁸ The project took extra time because of the sensitive nature of the work and because, as the Joint Center's first high-profile local assignment, Wilson wanted it to go off without a hitch. Before the team was able to present its final report, however, a leaked copy ended up in the hands of Tom Eisenstadt, chair of the Boston School Committee. For weeks, Eisenstadt's office had been juggling "angry and questioning telephone calls" from furious white parents disturbed by the possibility of their children being bussed across town in the name of integration.⁴⁹ He thumbed through the report, "Changes in School Attendance Districts as a Means of Alleviating Racial Imbalance in the Boston Public Schools," just long enough to decide that all eight proposals were "extreme and illogical," even though the most radical intervention would have left two-thirds of non-white pupils in imbalanced schools.⁵⁰ "No part of this plan is educationally defensible," exclaimed one naysayer. "In my opinion it does more harm than good." Right before the summer recess, the School Committee voted three to two against even discussing it.⁵¹

Wilson was crushed. The year-long commission had been for naught, and he knew the Joint Center "could never duplicate the concentrated effort we put into the project—we simply don't

⁴⁴James Wilson to Vincent Fulmer, June 15, 1965, folder: JCUS 1/65-6/66, box 72, AC 134, IA.

⁴⁵Lewis Kitchen to Vincent Fulmer, July 12, 1965, folder: JCUS 1/65-6/66, box 72, AC 134, IA.

⁴⁶Press Release, Feb. 23, 1966, folder: JCUS 1/65-6/66, box 72, AC 134, IA; "Ford Foundation Grants \$1,400,000 for Research in Area of Urban Affairs," *Tech*, Feb. 25, 1966, 5.

⁴⁷Adam R. Nelson, *The Elusive Ideal: Equal Educational Opportunity and the Federal Role in Boston's Public Schools, 1950–1985* (Chicago, 2005), 43–50; Massachusetts Racial Imbalance Act, 1965 Chap. 0641 (1965), <http://archives.lib.state.ma.us/handle/2452/15229> (accessed Aug. 25, 2022).

⁴⁸Bertram G. Waters, "Redistricting Study Started to Cure Imbalance," *Boston Globe*, Apr. 24, 1966, A12.

⁴⁹Bertram G. Waters, "Redistricting Leads to Roxbury Unrest," *Boston Globe*, May 11, 1966, 2.

⁵⁰Technical Assistance Team of the Joint Center for Urban Studies, *Changes in School Attendance Districts as a Means of Alleviating Racial Imbalance in the Boston Public Schools* (Cambridge, MA, 1966), 1–3.

⁵¹Bertram G. Waters, "All 8 Imbalance Plans Rejected," *Boston Globe*, June 3, 1966, 1, 5.

have the manpower or the money.” When asked whether he was disappointed by the School Committee’s summary rejection of the study, Wilson confessed that calling it a disappointment “would be the greatest understatement of many years.”⁵²

Three weeks later, on June 30, 1966, having submitted a resignation letter eight months earlier, Wilson officially vacated the directorship.⁵³ His replacement was Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a friend and occasional collaborator. Moynihan’s government experience and authorship of the controversial report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (1965), which linked Black poverty to female-headed households, had prepped him for whatever political bombs might get lobbed his way at the Joint Center.⁵⁴ Wilson was intrigued by Moynihan’s findings and “delighted” to learn of his appointment—and relieved.⁵⁵ Wilson had been turned off by the politics of urban renewal and grown tired of running an organization that seemed to exacerbate the very problems it had been created to solve. Besides, after three years of contemplating the urban crisis and the relationship between persons and things, Wilson, in an article in *The Public Interest*, was pretty sure that, when it came to “dealing with so-called ‘urban’ problems, the word ‘urban’ is less relevant than the word ‘human.’”⁵⁶

This had become a familiar refrain for Wilson, who had been optimistic about federally sponsored urban rejuvenation when he arrived at the Joint Center. But the recent wave of urban rebellions, during a period of relative economic prosperity and unprecedented federal legislation to address discrimination no less, combined with his rocky center directorship, had given him pause.⁵⁷ For too long, said Wilson, in a speech at the Urban Institute of Boston University, a year after leaving his post at the Joint Center, “all of us (and I do not exclude myself),” had naively cast the urban crisis as a “problem of bureaucracy” and thus amenable to bureaucratic solutions.⁵⁸ However, the uneven results of federal “programs and palliatives” had exposed the limits of organizational responses like building roads, housing complexes, and schools, and of job programs and other social welfare services.⁵⁹ True, millions of poor people had responded affirmatively to the war on poverty and benefited from expanding economic opportunities. But the continued erosion of civility and moral order, especially in the overwhelmingly Black and ethnic “innermost parts of the central city,” home of the newly coined “underclass,” revealed to him the pitfalls of relying on material incentives and that stronger disincentives might be needed to fix the problem.⁶⁰ By this point, Wilson had already decided that “crime in the streets”—and the people who committed it—was the major issue for most Americans and the real source of the urban crisis. He would study that instead.⁶¹

Part II. Committee

Wilson would go on to become one of the nation’s most influential criminologists, lending his expertise to both Democrats and Republicans, from Lyndon Johnson and Hubert Humphrey to

⁵²Richard R. Edmonds, “Urban Center Solutions to Imbalance Rejected,” *Crimson*, June 6, 1966.

⁵³James Wilson to J. A. Stratton, Oct. 7, 1965, folder: JCUS 1/65-6/66, box 72, AC 134, IA.

⁵⁴Geary, *Beyond Civil Rights*, 79–109. Wilson and Moynihan met at the Joint Center in 1962 and immediately hit it off; see James Q. Wilson, “Gentleman, Politician, Scholar,” *Public Interest* 152 (Summer 2003): 113–9.

⁵⁵Wilson to Stratton, Oct. 7, 1965, AC 134, IA.

⁵⁶James Q. Wilson, “The War on the Cities,” *Public Interest* 3 (Spring 1966): 27–44, here 39, 28.

⁵⁷Henry J. Aaron, *Politics and the Professors: The Great Society in Perspective* (Washington, DC, 1978), 146–78; Gareth Davies, *From Opportunity to Entitlement: The Transformation and Decline of Great Society Liberalism* (Lawrence, KS, 1996), 75–130.

⁵⁸James Q. Wilson, Untitled talk, Urban Institute of Boston University, Sept. 19, 1967, folder 14, box 19, PJQW, subsequently reprinted in *The Urban Crisis and Urban Affairs Education: Proceedings of a Conference Sponsored by the Urban Institute of Boston University*, ed. Joseph S. Slavet (Boston, 1969), 7–16, here 12–3.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹James Q. Wilson, “Crime in the Streets,” *Public Interest* 5 (Fall 1966): 26–34.

Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. He chaired the task force behind the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968—the linchpin of the federal government’s war on crime. The legislation created the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration to help coordinate national strategy and provided \$400 million to motivate state and local governments to upgrade their crime-fighting capabilities.⁶² Later, his “broken windows theory” became a touchstone in the criminological field and community policing a “best practice” in cities everywhere. In Wilson’s case, professionally speaking, crime paid.⁶³

Wilson’s criminological work was and remains controversial. His unsympathetic depiction of the Black underclass, while reflecting the main tenets of midcentury “poverty knowledge,” struck many people as little more than “anti-Negro sentiment ... nothing but racism,” a charge he acknowledged but strenuously denied.⁶⁴ Recently, Wilson’s work has attracted renewed critical attention from prison reformers, journalists, and scholars, including Elizabeth Hinton, Issa Kohler-Hausmann, Bench Ansfield, and Sam Collings-Wells, who have identified him as a key architect of America’s race-based carceral state.⁶⁵

Although he famously rode in patrol cars and walked about blighted neighborhoods to observe the worst of the urban crisis for himself, Wilson spent far more time in tweedy Cambridge, Massachusetts. That was where he rubbed elbow patches with his overwhelmingly wealthy, white, male colleagues and students at Harvard University, and where he put some of his ideas on policing and crime control in action during the campus crisis of the 1960s.

When Wilson got interested in criminology, the field was in flux. The accepted sociological explanation for the rising crime rate pegged it to poverty and had predicted that as economic opportunities and social melioration increased, crime would naturally decrease. However, when urban crime kept skyrocketing faster than at any time since the Great Depression, Wilson decided that pinpointing crime’s root *causes* should wait. Coming up with ways to deter crime and mitigate its *effects* was the more urgent need, he thought, and apt to produce speedier results, since “a person is not likely to commit a crime if he is behind bars with a guard watching him.” This was all the proverbial “reasonable man” wanted, insisted Wilson—some peace of mind and a commonsense strategy “to reduce the chance of [his] wife having her purse snatched by some punk on the way to the supermarket.” When in full-on social scientist mode, Wilson called his theory of crime prevention “order maintenance.”⁶⁶

Wilson unveiled the concept of order maintenance in *Varieties of Police Behavior: The Management of Law and Order in Eight Communities*, published in 1968, the first major criminological work of his career. Hailed by his new friend Irving Kristol as “the finest book on the

⁶²James Q. Wilson et al., *Report of the President’s Task Force on Crime*, Dec. 15, 1967, folder Ex FG 600/Task Force/Crime, box 362, White House Central Files, LBJ Library, Austin, TX. On the rollout of the legislation, which superseded the Law Enforcement Assistance Act of 1965, see Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge, MA, 2016), 1–2, 142.

⁶³George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson, “Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety,” *Atlantic Monthly*, Mar. 1982, 29–38; Matt Delisi, “Conservatism and Common Sense: The Criminological Career of James Q. Wilson,” *Justice Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (Sept. 2003): 661–74.

⁶⁴Alice O’Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton, NJ, 2001); Wilson, Untitled talk, 10.

⁶⁵On the carceral state, see Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*; Issa Kohler-Hausmann, *Misdemeanorland: Criminal Courts and Social Control in an Age of Broken Windows Policing* (Princeton, NJ, 2018); Bench Ansfield, “The Broken Windows of the Bronx: Putting the Theory in Its Place,” *American Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (Mar. 2020): 103–27; Sam Collings-Wells, “From Black Power to Broken Windows: Liberal Philanthropy and the Carceral State,” *Journal of Urban History* 48, no.4 (July 2022): 739–59; and Heather Ann Thompson, “Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History,” *Journal of American History* 97, no. 3 (Dec. 2010): 703–34.

⁶⁶James Q. Wilson, “Entering Criminology Through the Back Door,” *The Criminologist* 13, no. 6 (Nov.–Dec. 1988): 1, 5, 8, 14–5; James Q. Wilson, *Thinking About Crime* (1975; New York, 2013), 3–15, 105–32; James Q. Wilson, “A Reader’s Guide to the Crime Commission,” *Public Interest* 9 (Fall 1967): 64–82, here 77, 65.

American police ever written,” *Varieties* explored the role of the patrolperson—the beat cop—in the maintenance of law *and* order.⁶⁷ These were two separate police activities, according to Wilson. An officer performed a “law enforcement” activity when the law was broken and “familiar, routine steps are taken to make the offender liable to the penalties of the law,” such as issuing a parking ticket or arresting a thief. The far more common activity was “order maintenance,” which required impromptu decision making in fluid situations—for instance, a gathering mob, where technically the law had not been broken (yet) but the preservation of social order was clearly jeopardized.⁶⁸ *Varieties* did not include any detailed marching orders for mayors or police chiefs, but it did not take an undercover detective to figure out where Wilson stood on the matter: effective order maintenance required strong disincentives—more police on the streets and harsher penalties, for example—to increase the “costs” of criminal activity.⁶⁹

By 1968, order maintenance had become a major concern in cities, on campuses, and in the space between them. Following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., on April 4, rebellions gripped the nation. Some of the worst violence occurred on college campuses, where grief-stricken and distraught students raged against Vietnam and the university’s complicity in the “military-industrial complex”; against institutionalized racism at predominantly white universities; and against the university’s exploitative development and planning operations that protesters claimed worsened urban poverty and decline.⁷⁰

Remarkably, Harvard escaped the spring of 1968 relatively unscathed, despite being home to the country’s largest Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) chapter, with 200 members, and a well-organized but far smaller Association of African and Afro-American Students (Afro).⁷¹ Publicly, Harvard’s president Nathan Pusey extolled the innate superiority of Harvard’s men and (Radcliffe) women as the reason why.⁷² “Harvard is a more highly developed organism than some other universities,” said Pusey. “Everywhere you look responsibility exists.”⁷³

Privately, Pusey harbored doubts. A trained classicist who knew a thing or two about the rise and fall of empires, Pusey was unnerved by the uprisings, particularly the crisis at Columbia, which, like Harvard, was an urban Ivy League institution. He decided to act. Pusey empaneled two committees—the Faculty Committee on African and Afro-American Studies, chaired by economist Henry Rosovsky, and the Committee on the University and the City, chaired by Wilson, newly promoted to full professor—in the hopes of avoiding Columbia’s fate.⁷⁴

⁶⁷Irving Kristol, “Paying for Protection,” review of *Varieties of Police Behavior*, by James Q. Wilson, *New Leader*, Dec. 2, 1968, 24–5.

⁶⁸James Q. Wilson, *Varieties of Police Behavior: The Management of Law and Order in Eight Communities* (Cambridge, MA, 1968), 16–8, here 17.

⁶⁹On the lack of recommendations, see Patrick V. Murphy, review of *Varieties of Police Behavior*, by James Q. Wilson, *Harvard Law Review* 83, no. 8 (June 1970): 1943–7. In a new preface written ten years later, Wilson explained the absence of recommendations to “make the police better crime fighters” in the first edition to the lack of quality research. See James Q. Wilson, *Varieties of Police Behavior: The Management of Law and Order in Eight Communities* (1968; Cambridge, MA, 1978), x–xi. For some of his policy recommendations, see James Q. Wilson, “Crime and Law Enforcement,” in *Agenda for the Nation: Papers on Domestic and Foreign Policy Issues*, ed. Kermit Gordon (Washington, DC, 1968), 179–206, here 205–6.

⁷⁰On universities and urban renewal, see Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940–1960* (1983; Chicago, 1998), 135–70; and LaDale C. Winling, *Building the Ivory Tower: Universities and Metropolitan Development in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia, 2017).

⁷¹Alta D. Amponsah, Matthew Moore, and Janae Strickland, “Welcome to the Harvard Black Community,” *Crimson*, Sept. 11, 2017. Until the 1970s Harvard admitted only twelve Black undergraduates per year.

⁷²Lawrence E. Eichel, Kenneth W. Jost, Robert D. Luskin, and Richard M. Neustadt, *The Harvard Strike* (Boston, 1970), 28–35.

⁷³Joel R. Kramer, “Pusey Sees Harvard’s Structure as Security Against Violent Revolt,” *Crimson*, May 9, 1968.

⁷⁴Harvard University, *Report of the President of Harvard College and Reports of Departments, 1967–68* (Cambridge, MA, 1969), 50.

Both committees worked deep into the fall term, Rosovsky's creating a plan for Black studies, Wilson's assigned a somewhat more ambiguous charge, trying to figure out, in Pusey's words, "how this University is relating to its own immediate environment."⁷⁵ In someone else's hands the directive likely would have been treated in a perfunctory manner, but Wilson took it as an invitation to consider the interaction of individuals and organizations and to size up Harvard's impact on the metropolitan space.⁷⁶

After months of interviewing faculty and students, poring over curricula, and examining programs, Wilson had some good news. There was plenty of evidence that Harvard students and faculty were relating well to their surroundings and contributing their energy and intellect to redressing racial and economic injustice across the Boston metropolitan area. The interest in urban affairs, previously confined to the Joint Center and the Graduate School of Design, now suffused the institution. Faculty were working on 160 different urban-focused research projects. Classes on urban affairs were being offered in all the professional schools and throughout the Arts & Sciences. Graduate and undergraduate students were pursuing study in a variety of public service fields and volunteering in local schools, health clinics, counseling storefronts, and community planning offices in the poor neighborhoods located just "a dozen steps" beyond Harvard's gates. "The deep and legitimate interest of students in community affairs and public service ... affects how they view and experience their own education," said Wilson, "and how they respond to the teaching and scholarship the university offers them."⁷⁷

The bad news, however, was that Wilson pinpointed Harvard University—and the people who ran it—as a major perpetrator of the urban problems its students and faculty were trying to solve. Harvard's sprawling campus (along with MIT's) dominated the metropolitan space. Its \$180 million annual budget, 15,000 students, and 13,000 employees made Harvard a major economic engine; its expanding 350-acre footprint and 2,000 rental units made it a major developer and landlord chasing out poor residents, driving down the tax base, and pushing up rents. For years, Harvard had been gobbling up property in Cambridge and across the Charles River, just below Soldier Field, in Boston's working-class Allston-Brighton neighborhood, and farther south in Mission Hill, where Harvard had recently purchased and razed 182 "black and white workers' homes" to make room for a new construction.⁷⁸ Not without some justification, students concerned about expansion, like their counterparts in Morningside Heights, compared Harvard to an "urban imperialist," persuading Wilson that Harvard was contributing to the "loss of confidence in the legitimacy" of itself.⁷⁹

The worst news of all, reported Wilson, was that Harvard stood little chance of fixing the mess it had created. The institution was deeply divided. Harvard was a complex, highly decentralized organization riddled with competing schools, departments, centers, and institutes, each separately led and inspired, each jockeying for its own advantage, "linked today only by the steam tunnels," Wilson quipped, making collective action nearly impossible.⁸⁰

The faculty members were also divided as to whether their expertise could be applied to contemporary policy questions. On one side were aspiring "problem-solvers." They possessed relevant knowledge and inhabited professional schools, like medicine, education, and business, or one of Harvard's centers and institutes, "that are necessarily involved in their environment and

⁷⁵*Preliminary Report of the Committee on the University and the City* (Cambridge, MA, 1968), iii–iv. A condensed version of the Wilson Report was published in James Q. Wilson et al., "The University and the City: The Wilson Report," *Harvard Alumni Bulletin* 71 (Feb. 1969): 17–40.

⁷⁶James Q. Wilson, "The Urban Unease: Community vs. City," *Public Interest* 12 (Summer 1968): 25–39.

⁷⁷Wilson et al., "University and the City," 21, 19.

⁷⁸"Big Business Wears Academic Robes," *Boston Globe*, Mar. 16, 1969, A15; Parker Donham, "Harvard Defends Housing," *Boston Globe*, Jan. 12, 1969, 38; Eichel et al., *Harvard Strike*, 66–8.

⁷⁹Students for a Democratic Society, *Harvard: Urban Imperialist* (Cambridge, MA, 1969); Wilson et al., "University and the City," 18.

⁸⁰Wilson et al., "University and the City," 18.

therefore inevitably involved in the problems of that environment.” On the other side were “academic intellectuals,” the standard-bearers of Harvard’s community of scholars. They privileged theoretical knowledge, worked in disciplinary departments like philosophy and English, and doubted whether their ideas had any utility beyond the academy—and conversely that interaction with those beyond the academy threatened to bias the quest for truth—because they were trained to discover “what is generally true about human affairs; not what is true in the specific case.”⁸¹

As one of Harvard’s elite cadre of in-demand problem-solvers *and* academic intellectuals, Wilson could speak to the divided commitments of the faculty with singular authority. His time at the Joint Center had revealed the limits of social knowledge when dealing with complex human and organizational problems. “Harvard cannot solve most of the problems that face us,” he cautioned, “nor can it always act collectively to make a contribution toward their solution. It is too easy to arouse false hopes and to stimulate unrealizable expectations.”⁸² The university, like the Joint Center, and the city that girdled both, were just collections of people who did as they pleased. “The university can rarely have a single purpose, or act with a single will,” asserted Wilson, “because ‘the’ university does not exist.”⁸³ Once again, the nation’s leading institutionalist erased the very existence of an institution, privileging the seemingly random collection of individuals who happened to collect a paycheck from that institution instead.

In December 1968, Wilson delivered “University and the City” to Pusey, who selectively featured it in his annual President’s Report.⁸⁴ Pusey highlighted the data on faculty and student engagement in the community as evidence of unity and progress but brushed aside Wilson’s abstruse organizational analysis and dissection of professorial types, eliding the gloomy predictions and doubts about Harvard’s ability to solve the urban problems it had caused. Pusey also commended the report to the faculty without mentioning any of Wilson’s recommendations, not even the most crucial one: the appointment of a community affairs administrator to rationalize “the organizational capacity of the University to deal with its environment.”⁸⁵

On April 9, 1969, after months of escalating tensions, the university imploded, as Wilson had feared, when SDS blockaded University Hall, the main administration building, which was the first step in its plan to “smash ROTC [Reserve Officers’ Training Corps],” stop “campus expansion,” and end the war in Vietnam. A day later, Pusey called in the state and municipal police to retake the building. The brutal, bloody, ten-minute “bust” shocked the campus, resulting in 196 arrests and the suspension of normal campus activities for the rest of the term. With Pusey disgraced and the student body on strike, the faculty—already divided by professional outlook, further divided into warring conservative and liberal caucuses—tried to pick up the pieces.⁸⁶

The rise of the caucuses, and their differences in terms of academic rank and temperament, persuaded Wilson that Harvard was more like the political organizations he studied than he had previously thought. The conservatives consisted of roughly fifty older, senior faculty, led by Supreme Court expert Robert McCloskey and international relations scholars Ernest May and Samuel Huntington. They sided with the administration, if not Pusey himself, and wanted to reassert faculty power and hold the rulebreakers accountable. Wilson, the institutionalist and advocate of law and order, joined them. The liberals, meanwhile, were led by Stanley Hoffmann, also an international relations scholar, and economist John Kenneth Galbraith

⁸¹Ibid., 19.

⁸²Ibid., 22.

⁸³Ibid., 18.

⁸⁴Harvard University, *Report of the President of Harvard College and Reports of Departments, 1967–68*, 5–13.

⁸⁵Wilson et al., “University and the City,” 25–6. For the reception of the report, see Robert Reinhold, “Harvard Panel Urges Improved Community Ties,” *New York Times*, Jan. 14, 1969, 22; and William R. Galeota, “The Wilson Report,” *Crimson*, Jan. 16, 1969.

⁸⁶Eichel et al., *Harvard Strike, 77–132*; Keller and Keller, *Making Harvard Modern*, 307–41; Roger Rosenblatt, *Coming Apart: A Memoir of the Harvard Wars of 1969* (New York, 1997), 35–50.

and political theorist Michael Walzer, who were less well-organized but drew twice as many members thanks to the overwhelming support of Harvard's untenured junior faculty.⁸⁷ The liberals sympathized with the students against the administration and sought an honest reckoning of Harvard's deep web of economic and political entanglements, particularly those tied to the university's centers and institutes. "In ordinary circumstances, no matter the issue, we trusted each other around here," Wilson told the *Boston Globe*, shortly after the campus meltdown. "We don't anymore."⁸⁸

But both sides agreed that "saving the institution" should be the top priority. After passing a resolution condemning the occupation and the administration's heavy-handed response, and offering support for the creation of Black studies, the faculty established an emergency tribunal known as the Committee of Fifteen to adjudicate the backlog of disciplinary cases now before it. The body was staffed by ten faculty and five students, and except for Wilson and economist John Dunlop, dominated by the liberal caucus.⁸⁹ Although outnumbered, Wilson saw this as a prime opportunity to replace the existing, outmoded paternalistic disciplinary system, known as the Administration Board, with a "more formal, more detailed, and more legalistic" process, he wrote, that included "written procedures ensuring notice, the opportunity to appear and to confront one's accuser, the right to advice and to appeal, and outlining rules of evidence and testimony." Who deserved to be "a member of the university"? In Wilson's mind, this was the question that the committee needed to answer.⁹⁰

The Committee of Fifteen spent five weeks sequestered on the tenth floor of Holyoke Center buried beneath a "staggering workload" of cases. Defendants were permitted a witness and legal adviser, and every hearing was allotted two hours but usually only took "a few minutes," since most students boycotted the proceedings, leaving it to the panel (typically absent the student representatives, since they also joined the boycott) to review the evidence and reach a verdict.⁹¹ Not that SDS ignored the hearings altogether. "Guards and locked doors proved necessary in the face of repeated threats of disruption," recalled Wilson. "One confrontation did in fact occur, when 75 or so marching students demanded access to a hearing for the stated purpose of disrupting it. Some of their number came close to attempting a forcible entry, but eventually they departed."⁹² Wilson, his arms folded, "stood in front of one door" to block the angry mob, all the while, according to an observer, remaining as "cool as he did giving a lecture."⁹³

Exactly two months after the University Hall occupation, on June 9, the Committee of Fifteen presented its findings to the full faculty at the Loeb Drama Center.⁹⁴ Of the 138 students tried by the emergency tribunal, sixteen were "separated" from the university (three permanently), twenty more were given "suspended" sentences contingent on continued good behavior, and the rest were issued "warnings." Wilson and Dunlop had sought more severe penalties but yielded to the liberals, who wanted to send a message to the radicals but avoid further

⁸⁷"Then, Faculty Condemnation," *Boston Globe*, Oct. 12, 1969, A18–20.

⁸⁸A Harvard Faculty Member, "The Kingdom and the Power: The Story Behind the Faculty's New Outlook," *Crimson*, Sept. 24, 1970; Mark W. Oberle, "Harvard Faculty Organizes in Response to Crisis," *Science*, July 4, 1969, 49–51; Eichel et al., *Harvard Strike*, 156–60; Bernard D. Nossiter, "Harvard Professor: SDS Causing Faculty, Student Factions," *Boston Globe*, June 1, 1969, 8.

⁸⁹Harvard University, *Report of the President of Harvard College and Reports of Departments, 1968–69* (Cambridge, MA, 1970), 64–65; Eichel et al., *Harvard Strike*, 218–39.

⁹⁰James Q. Wilson, "Student Discipline in a Private University," undated, folder 10, box 16, PJQW, 1–52, here 2; Seymour Martin Lipset and David Riesman, *Education and Politics at Harvard: Two Essays Prepared for the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education* (New York, 1975), 225.

⁹¹Wilson, "Student Discipline in a Private University," PJQW, 18.

⁹²*Ibid.*

⁹³Larry Van Dyne, "200 Try to Kill Harvard Hearing," *Boston Globe*, May 16, 1969, 39; Rosenblatt, *Coming Apart*, 118; "Harvard Students Fail to Halt Panel," *New York Times*, May 16, 1969, 50.

⁹⁴*The Committee of Fifteen: Created by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University* (Cambridge, MA, 1969), 1–78.

unrest. The liberals' plan failed. Later that night, at Memorial Hall, a communitywide question-and-answer session hosted by the committee instantly turned acrimonious. Students, riled by the tribunal's verdicts and tired of being lectured, cut off speakers with cat-calls and hisses. Wilson, who, recalled another committee member, had difficulty concealing his desire to "beat down the radical students" during the hearings, now received his comeuppance. Before saying a word, he was booed and prevented from speaking at all.⁹⁵

The entire campus community took notice of Wilson's audacious administrative performance. His fellow conservatives elevated him to their steering committee and whipped votes to elect him the inaugural chair of the Committee on Rights and Responsibilities (CRR), the designated successor to the Committee of Fifteen.⁹⁶ Pusey noticed. He appointed conservative allies to key posts in a last-ditch effort to salvage his sinking administration, naming John Dunlop the dean of faculty, Ernest May the dean of the college, and Wilson the chair of the department of government.⁹⁷ The liberal caucus and student radicals noticed, too, and did everything in their power to make Wilson's first year running the CRR and the department of government as miserable as possible.

Things kicked off with a bang in September 1969. Members of SDS raided the Center for International Affairs, a research hub and contract clearinghouse cofounded by Harvard-government-professor-turned-Nixon-adviser (and SDS enemy) Henry Kissinger, then on leave in Washington.⁹⁸ In October, an SDS offshoot called the November Action Committee conducted a less destructive but still raucous "mill through" of the same building. Emboldened by their hit-and-run tactics, eighty SDS demonstrators descended on University Hall a few days before Thanksgiving to protest the treatment of Black workers on campus, breaking into Dean May's office and holding him hostage for ninety minutes as they "chanted, shouted and screamed at him."⁹⁹ Not to be outdone, the Organization for Black Unity flexed its muscles in December when protesters staged a roving occupation that began at University Hall, where May, frustrated and frantic, was waiting, bullhorn in hand, to declare all participants "hereby suspended," in a clear breach of the CRR's commitment to due process. The protesters next moved to the construction site of Gund Hall, the future home of the Graduate School of Design, to the Faculty Club, then back to University Hall.¹⁰⁰ The spring semester witnessed more of the same—sorties on University Hall and the Center for International Affairs—before culminating in the nighttime "trashing" of Harvard Square, in April, and another mass protest, in May, following the U.S. Air Force's bombing of Cambodia.¹⁰¹

The constant mayhem kept the CRR's docket filled with cases and spilled over into its actual proceedings. Wilson bitterly recalled how defendants took every opportunity to "snarl the hearings" and to drag out trials for hours that they had previously refused to attend.¹⁰² The accused arrived with tape recorders and cameras, and, in one instance, a newspaper reporter, to expose the inner workings of what were supposed to be closed sessions.¹⁰³ Their antics annoyed and

⁹⁵Rosenblatt, *Coming Apart*, 112, 193–4, 207–8.

⁹⁶James M. Fallows, "150 in Faculty Oppose Formal Vote on Vietnam," *Crimson*, Oct. 7, 1969; Wilson, "Student Discipline in a Private University," *PJQW*, 3; Harvard University, *Report of the President of Harvard College and Reports of Departments, 1969–70* (Cambridge, MA, 1971), 58–9; Garrett Epps, "Faculty Designates 18 to Serve on Council; First Meeting Today," *Crimson*, Feb. 9, 1970.

⁹⁷Lipset and Riesman, *Education and Politics at Harvard*, 224–5. Wilson served as chair from 1969–1973, except for spring 1971, when he was on leave and Samuel Huntington served in his stead.

⁹⁸George Croft and Andrew Blake, "Gang Mauls Harvard Staff," *Boston Globe*, Sept. 26, 1969, 1.

⁹⁹Robert Reinhold, "Harvard Ousts 16 for Protest Role," *New York Times*, Dec. 16, 1969, 26; "Rights Committee to Hear Charges Against Students Participating in Obstruction," *Crimson*, Nov. 21, 1969.

¹⁰⁰Robert Reinhold, "Harvard Ousts 75 in Black Protest," *New York Times*, Dec. 12, 1969, 1, 59.

¹⁰¹Harvard University, *Report of the President of Harvard College and Reports of Departments, 1969–70*, 5–7; Robert L. Turner, "Cambridge Riot Called Threat to Right of Dissent," *Boston Globe*, Apr. 17, 1970, 1.

¹⁰²Wilson, "Student Discipline in a Private University," *PJQW*, 19.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 22.

angered the CRR's six faculty and intimidated its three student jurists, who rarely showed up. Through it all, Wilson did his best to "cope with objections and arguments that occasionally had a complexity and absurdity that would have made the views of the Queen of Hearts [from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*] seem a model of reasonableness. The nits were picked, with vengeance."¹⁰⁴

Wilson left scant record of the juridical work that consumed him between April 1969 and December 1970. There is not much information about the 170 cases he adjudicated, nor the twenty-five students he "separated" from Harvard under the CRR's "three-strike" sentencing guidelines. An unpublished, undated paper titled "Student Discipline in a Private University," likely drafted in spring 1971, was his only substantive comment on an experience that he mostly wanted to forget. This lengthy postmortem offered a frank account of the CRR's problematic effort to reallocate governing authority within the university and to establish a "new basis of institutional legitimacy."¹⁰⁵

Upon reflection, Wilson could do no better than judge the CRR a partial success. The CRR failed to bring the campus community back together, as was hoped, because most students decided that the CRR had only existed to "punish students."¹⁰⁶ From an order maintenance standpoint, however, he thought the CRR "did rather well, all things considered."¹⁰⁷ The CRR's willingness to hand down real punishments had basically worked, as his research on crime prevention suggested it would. Hardline sentences that resulted in the deprivation of liberty or outright exclusion from campus had produced a salutary effect, convincing him, beyond a reasonable doubt, that when it came to managing complex human organizations, like universities, powerful disincentives were a necessary part of order maintenance. "What ultimately led to a partial restoration of calm," he concluded, "was partly that the penalties levied by the Committee of Fifteen and the CRR had raised significantly the price to be paid for obstructive and disruptive behavior and partly that no passion, including that for first principles, can long be sustained. Weariness combined with deterrence had their effect."¹⁰⁸

Part III. Department

Simultaneously running the CRR and the department of government exhausted Wilson. He took leave during the spring term of 1971, traveling across Europe to gather himself, catch up on his research and writing, and visit friends.¹⁰⁹ While Wilson was abroad, the rise of personal attacks against conservative faculty and administrators marked a disturbing shift in SDS's tactics. SDS targeted Ernest May, John Dunlop, and Samuel Huntington but seemed particularly fixated on Wilson's mentor, Edward Banfield, who likely endured the harshest treatment. As the faculty adviser to Harvard's branch of the Young Americans for Freedom, a member of the conservative caucus, and President Nixon's point person on urban affairs, he was easy prey. He was also an iconoclastic scholar who had just penned his most controversial book yet, *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis* (1970), a fiery takedown of the

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 27–28; James M. Fallows, "Rights and Responsibilities Committee Initiates New Discipline Procedure," *Crimson*, Sept. 27, 1969; M.D.L., "CRR Will Judge Students on Supposition, Not Facts," *Crimson*, May 18, 1970.

¹⁰⁵Harvard University, *Report of the President of Harvard College and Reports of Departments, 1970–71* (Cambridge, MA, 1972), 53; Wilson, "Student Discipline in a Private University," PJQW, 29; Rosenblatt, *Coming Apart*, 214–5.

¹⁰⁶Sanford Kreisberg, "Inside the CRR," *Crimson*, Feb. 11, 1971.

¹⁰⁷Wilson, "Student Discipline in a Private University," PJQW, 27.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 32.

¹⁰⁹Sargent Kennedy, secretary of the Harvard Corporation, to Whom It May Concern, Feb. 16, 1971, folder 32, box 34, PJQW. Wilson traveled to England, France, Germany, Greece, and Italy, where he stayed with Harvey Mansfield and his wife, Delba, in Florence. Harvey Mansfield to James Wilson, May 28, 1994, folder 14, box 9, PJQW.

Great Society's battle to save America's cities.¹¹⁰ Banfield thought life in most cities was better than ever, and that some degree of poverty, or "backwardness," was unavoidable, not because of racism, the usual explanation for poverty, but because of "class culture," which he had first identified in rural Italy, in the 1950s, and now, like Moynihan, used to explain away the persistence of poor people in the United States.¹¹¹ The book sold 100,000 copies, but not everyone was buying it. The chair of Princeton's politics department dismissed it as "patent racism"; a disgusted book-panel participant at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association branded it a scholarly "charade"; a *Village Voice* review, reprints of which radicals handed out in Harvard Yard, called it a "piece of shit."¹¹²

By the time Wilson returned from Europe for the start of the 1971 fall term and the resumption of his department chair duties, the campus mood had lightened. Nathan Pusey was out as president; law professor Derek Bok was in. The faculty caucuses had scaled back their operations. The experiment in coeducational houses, now entering its second year, was a welcome distraction for students. And University Hall, under repair since the SDS occupation, was finally ready for its grand reopening.¹¹³

The good vibes did not last. In September, after two harrowing years on the job, Ernest May abruptly resigned as undergraduate dean, jumping at the chance to direct the Kennedy School's Institute for Politics—and to get away from the students!¹¹⁴ Two months later, Edward Banfield, on leave in North Africa, informed Wilson that he planned to "quit" Harvard for a position at the University of Pennsylvania. Wilson was floored, telling the *Crimson* that Banfield was "a scholar's scholar" and irreplaceable.¹¹⁵ On top of everything else, the Joint Center had fallen on hard times, according to reports, burning through its money and three directors in five years, including Moynihan, who vacated the post after two years to join the Nixon White House.¹¹⁶ Although it would eventually obtain a lifeline, ironically, given Wilson's experience, from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Joint Center's heyday as the country's "pioneer urban studies center" was over.¹¹⁷

Wilson took these losses personally, but nothing affected him quite like the case of his new friend, Richard Herrnstein, of the department of psychology, who came under sustained SDS fire that fall. Wilson and Herrnstein had met during the SDS strike, when Wilson received word that there was a "right-wing psychologist" in William James Hall who was available if the conservative caucus needed him. Wilson thought they "needed anybody and everybody who was to the right of Hubert Humphrey," so he sought Herrnstein out.¹¹⁸

An unlikely pair, the nattily dressed Wilson ("Jim") and rumpled Herrnstein ("Dick") quickly discovered that they had more in common than political philosophy. They were the same age. Both men were married with children and lived in Belmont, a leafy inner suburb west of Cambridge. They enjoyed playing cards, jogging, and rooting for the Celtics and Red Sox. But their deepest connection was intellectual. Their shared interest in the study of human behavior, albeit using different approaches—individuals and organizations for Wilson, nature and nurture for Herrnstein—changed Wilson's life. "I had been intellectually

¹¹⁰Edward Banfield, *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis* (Boston, 1970); Michael E. Kinsley, "Conservatives Open Harvard Unit of Young Americans for Freedom," *Crimson*, Oct. 3, 1969.

¹¹¹Banfield and Fasano Banfield, *Moral Basis of a Backward Society*.

¹¹²Robert L. Bartley, "Mr. Banfield's Unheavenly Critics," review of *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis*, by Edward Banfield, *Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 30, 1971, 22.

¹¹³Nancy Weiss Malkiel, "Keep the Damned Women Out": *The Struggle for Coeducation* (Princeton, NJ, 2016), 203–4; Harvard University, *Report of the President of Harvard College and Reports of Departments, 1971–72* (Cambridge, MA, 1973), 66.

¹¹⁴"2 Harvard Posts Created by Bok," *New York Times*, Sept. 21, 1971, 22.

¹¹⁵"Banfield Quits Harvard, Takes Position at Penn," *Crimson*, Dec. 2, 1971.

¹¹⁶Geary, *Beyond Civil Rights*, 172; Klemek, *Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal*, 204–5.

¹¹⁷Kay Longcope, "Pioneer Urban Studies Center Ponders Its Future Course," *Boston Globe*, Apr. 11, 1971, A8.

¹¹⁸James Wilson to Richard Herrnstein, Aug. 8, 1994, folder 48, box 9, PjQW.

raised on class, status, party, organization, and institution,” he told Herrnstein, “but not on *people*.” Herrnstein challenged Wilson to think more systematically about people and the internal, rather than environmental, influences on them.¹¹⁹

Herrnstein had studied at Harvard under behaviorist B. F. Skinner before joining the faculty in 1958. He was a leading expert on the learned responses of pigeons as well as a proponent of theories of inherited intelligence.¹²⁰ A member of the conservative caucus and steering committee, and chair of the psychology department (1967–1971), Herrnstein flew under SDS’s radar until the fall of 1971 and the publication of “I.Q.” in the *Atlantic Monthly*. The article encapsulated and broadcast the main currents of his controversial hereditarian thinking, previously known to his close associates and friends, which he now advanced as a rationale for the abandonment of social welfare and compensatory education programs. This brought him the attention of a bigger, more hostile audience. The failure of equal opportunity programs to produce equal results, Herrnstein claimed, had exposed the predeterminative effect of heritable intelligence on social-class formation, leading him to a chilling conclusion: “Greater wealth, health, freedom, fairness, and educational opportunity are *not* going to give us a society of our [liberal] philosophical heritage.”¹²¹

Within days of the article’s release, an offshoot of SDS called the University Action Group (UAG), who had previously besieged May, Banfield, and Huntington, and were well known to the CRR, set their sights on Herrnstein. They handed out flyers reading “Fight Harvard Prof’s Fascist Lies,” and hung Old-West-style “wanted posters” around campus, festooned with Herrnstein’s picture: “Wanted for Racism: Pigeonman.” They infiltrated Herrnstein’s undergraduate psychology class for the chance to bait him and call him a racist. On one occasion, they followed Herrnstein back to his office and held him hostage for several hours. At first, Herrnstein tried reasoning with his captors and answering their questions, reminding them that his analysis focused on class, not race, and pointing out that he never mentioned race at all. Herrnstein’s effort to debate the merits of the essay backfired, however, when the UAG turned his acknowledged omission of race into a pretext for filing harassment charges against him instead.¹²² Then, in early December, Dr. Alvin Poussaint of the Harvard Medical School poured fuel on the fire with an op-ed in the *Boston Globe* that branded Herrnstein “an enemy of black people and ... a threat to the survival of every black person in America.”¹²³

With the wider campus Left now calling for Herrnstein’s head, some colleagues rallied around him. More than 100 faculty signed a petition protesting the radicals’ use of “political intimidation” and defending academic freedom.¹²⁴ The closest analogous event in Wilson’s experience was the uproar over Moynihan’s *The Negro Family*. But Moynihan had produced his policy memo as a member of the Johnson administration, and his chief detractors were political adversaries, journalists, and civil rights activists located outside the academy, while Herrnstein’s opponents emanated from within it.¹²⁵ Wilson was sufficiently alarmed by the

¹¹⁹Wilson to Herrnstein, PJQW, underline in original. Wilson said Herrnstein was “perhaps the worst-dressed adult male” he had ever seen; see Wilson, “Richard J. Herrnstein, 1930–1994,” undated, folder 7, box 16, PJQW.

¹²⁰Daniel Goleman, “Richard Herrnstein, 64, Dies; Backed Nature over Nurture,” *New York Times*, Sept. 16, 1994, B8. Herrnstein’s breakthrough discovery was the “Matching Law,” which linked rewards and behaviors in pigeons. See R. J. Herrnstein, “Relative and Absolute Strength of Response as a Function of Frequency of Reinforcement,” *Journal of Experimental Analysis of Behavior* 4, no. 3 (July 1961): 267–72.

¹²¹Richard J. Herrnstein, “I.Q.,” *Atlantic Monthly*, Sept. 1971, 43–64. He subsequently turned it into a book. Richard J. Herrnstein, *IQ in the Meritocracy* (New York, 1973).

¹²²“SDS Charges Herrnstein Harassed Grad Students,” *Crimson*, Dec. 15, 1971; Harvard University, *Report of the President of Harvard College and Reports of Departments, 1970–71*, 62–3.

¹²³Alvin F. Poussaint, M.D., “Herrnstein: A Black Point of View,” *Boston Globe*, Dec. 3, 1971, 20.

¹²⁴Qtd. in Harvard University, *Report of the President of Harvard College and Reports of Departments, 1971–72*, 78–9. On the faculty’s half-hearted support, see Norman Podhoretz, “The New Inquisitors,” *Commentary*, Apr. 1973, 7–8.

¹²⁵Geary, *Beyond Civil Rights*, 96–109; James Q. Wilson, “The Moynihan Memo Revisited—Notes from an Academic Friend,” *New York*, Apr. 27, 1970, 42–4.

fratricidal dimensions of the Herrnstein affair that he wrote an open letter to the student newspaper in an effort to clear the air. Wilson was not sure if the browbeating of his friend Herrnstein constituted “legal harassment,” or, for that matter, if it even ran afoul of the university’s policy as then construed, but it certainly went “beyond the bounds of civility.” Herrnstein had not been “physically abused,” shared Wilson, but he had suffered mightily as a result of the smear campaign and the UAG’s “effort to degrade [Herrnstein] so as to inhibit him and others from discussing views that a small, self-appointed minority find distasteful.”¹²⁶

That minority was larger and better coordinated than Wilson realized. In February 1972, Herrnstein had to withdraw from a talk at the University of Iowa because of personal threats against him; an appearance at Princeton was cancelled for the same reason in March.¹²⁷ Meanwhile, back at Harvard, UAG members again sacked the Center for International Affairs and occupied Wilson’s department office suite in Littauer Center. Wilson and Herrnstein identified the perpetrators and filed complaints with the CRR, but the committee equivocated, first ruling against the students before reversing course to reexamine the evidence, allowing the harassment to continue.¹²⁸ Finally, at a faculty meeting in April, having to this point been totally silent, and having decided that the main lesson from “the bust” was to proceed cautiously with the student radicals, President Bok weighed in, offering Herrnstein belated backing for having been the “subject of vituperative, *ad hominem* leaflets, and ... cries that he be dismissed and that his books be withdrawn from reading lists.”¹²⁹

Wilson had had enough. He was mad at the militants but madder at his colleagues and senior administrators for enabling the radicals and not doing more to protect Herrnstein and preserve academic freedom for all faculty. Unsure of what else to do, Wilson did the only thing he knew how to do: he wrote an article, “Liberalism versus Liberal Education,” originally given as a lecture at his undergraduate *alma mater*, the University of Redlands, and subsequently published in *Commentary* to make sure it reached its intended readership in Cambridge.¹³⁰

The essay offered a stinging rebuke of Harvard and other elite institutions like it. Wilson began with a nod to the available research, and a jab at his liberal colleagues, on the prevailing political views of most professors, citing his friend and Harvard colleague Seymour Lipset’s recent finding that “liberal arts stimulate liberal views, but the most distinguished, productive, and (presumably) highest-paid professors [like those at Harvard] ... are the most ‘liberal’ in their orientations.”¹³¹ The rest of the essay drew on Wilson’s own “confident generalizations” and observations of Harvard’s drift toward “illiberality” if not “authoritarian politics.”¹³² The list of off-limit topics closed to “serious discussion of all sides” now included Vietnam, urban ghettos, U.S. corporate involvement in foreign countries, and “a scientist who claimed that intelligence is largely inherited.”¹³³ Indeed, if forced to rank-order the institutions that had mattered to him most in his

¹²⁶James Q. Wilson, “Beyond the Bounds of Civility,” *Crimson*, Jan. 17, 1972.

¹²⁷R. J. Herrnstein, “On Challenging an Orthodoxy,” *Commentary*, Apr. 1973, 52–62.

¹²⁸“CRR Puts Off Decision on Blustein, Garfinkel,” *Crimson*, Mar. 28, 1972; Peter Shapiro, “Three Are Charged for Littauer Sit-In,” *Crimson*, June 5, 1972; Daniel Swanson, “CRR to Reconsider Cases of Students Charged for Littauer Center Takeover,” *Crimson*, Sept. 28, 1972. Blustein, who had crossed paths with the CRR on numerous occasions, was eventually separated from Harvard. See Abby Y. Fung, “Protest and Change,” *Crimson*, June 3, 1997.

¹²⁹Harvard University, *Report of the President of Harvard College and Reports of Departments, 1971–72*, 78, italics in original. On Bok’s leadership style, see Lipset and Reisman, *Education and Politics at Harvard*, 237; and Al Larkin, “The Cautious Presidency of Derek Bok,” *Boston Globe*, June 4, 1978, 11. Bok’s hands-off approach was consistent with many of his peers at other universities, who increasingly agreed that aggressive interventions against campus radicals did not pay off in the long run.

¹³⁰James Wilson, “Liberalism versus a Liberal Education,” Apr. 2, 1972, transcript, folder 2, box 17, PJQW, subsequently published as “Liberalism versus Liberal Education,” *Commentary*, June 1972, 50–4.

¹³¹Wilson, “Liberalism versus Liberal Education,” 50. Wilson was referring to Ladd Jr. and Lipset, “The Politics of American Political Scientists.”

¹³²Wilson, “Liberalism versus Liberal Education,” 50–1.

¹³³*Ibid.*, 51.

adult life—the Catholic Church he attended, the U.S. Navy he served, and the universities where he had studied and worked—in terms of the “extent to which free and uninhibited discussion was possible,” Wilson would place “Harvard of 1972” dead last.¹³⁴

How had Harvard plummeted so far, so fast? Wilson, framing his argument in terms of organizations and individuals, thought he knew. The causal chain linked the small minority of rabble-rousers to the liberal faculty caucus whose permissiveness emboldened them to the very essence of liberal education itself, thus implicating the “vast majority” of people who worked and studied at Harvard in its own unraveling.¹³⁵ The proper aims of a liberal education—civility, equanimity, and tolerance—Wilson explained, were achieved through the cultivation and harmonization of critical and sympathetic habits of mind. But when the “delicate balance” between these habits was upset, criticism could yield to denunciation and sympathy to dogmatism and to the over-identification with “deprived or despised groups” and the social causes—ending the war, saving the city, helping the poor—they espoused.¹³⁶ “[W]hat if those aided do not improve,” Wilson wondered, “or if for some reason personal efforts are not followed by institutional commitments?” The answer was one that he had learned for himself, the hard way: “Benevolence, when frustrated, often turns to rage and those who once celebrated the virtues of compassion may come to indulge in sentiments of hatred.”¹³⁷

The liberals waited a year to respond to Wilson’s charges against them. When Wilson’s name surfaced as a “rumored leading candidate” to succeed John Dunlop as the next dean of the Faculty of Arts & Sciences, the liberals mobilized once more, presenting President Bok a petition with sixty signatures opposing the appointment. Henry Rosovsky got the job. Wilson never worked in university administration again.¹³⁸

Conclusion

Wilson found plenty of other ways to spend his time. New opportunities emerged in Washington, first as Nixon’s drug adviser and as a member of the Commission on Presidential Scholars, until Watergate scared him away, then in one post after another during the conservative apogee of the Reagan and Bush years.¹³⁹ He aligned himself with other institutions inside the beltway, including the National Police Foundation, which sustained his criminological work, and the American Enterprise Institute, the *de facto* national headquarters of the neoconservative movement. He also kept writing for *The Public Interest*—as ever, in Kristol’s words, “a stalwart friend to the original group of ‘neos.’”¹⁴⁰ For a policy skeptic who thought it was “hard, though not impossible, to make useful and important changes in public policy,” particularly when those policies concerned people, Wilson never tired of coming up with new ways to put his skepticism to the test.¹⁴¹

Mostly, he enjoyed mentoring his graduate students, working on his scholarship, and spending time with his close colleagues and friends. Old friendships rekindled. Penn SDS, led by UAG veterans, chased its “Racist of the Year Award–winner,” Edward Banfield, out of Philadelphia and back to Harvard in 1975, where he remained for the rest of his career.¹⁴² New friendships deepened. Wilson and Herrnstein resumed their daily workouts and

¹³⁴Ibid.

¹³⁵Ibid., 50.

¹³⁶Ibid., 53, 52.

¹³⁷Ibid., 54.

¹³⁸Lipset and Reisman, *Education and Politics at Harvard*, 243–4; Antonio Bernardo, of the Anderson School of Management, UCLA, email to author, Oct. 24, 2019.

¹³⁹James Wilson to Robert Goldwin, Dec. 20, 1974, folder 46, box 9, PJQW.

¹⁴⁰Irving Kristol to James Wilson, July 24, 2002, folder 13, box 9, PJQW.

¹⁴¹Wilson, “A Life in the Public Interest,” A19.

¹⁴²Mark J. Penn, “Urban Expert Edward C. Banfield to Return to Government Department,” *Crimson*, July 29, 1975; Jim Crumer, “Banfield’s Back,” *Crimson*, Aug. 1, 1975.

conversations, and at some point, in the mid-1970s, while “jogging around the indoor track and pushing on the Nautilus machines,” in an effort to “change [their] middle-aged bodies while telling each other that people don’t change,” they decided to teach a course on crime. The lectures they outlined and cowrote became chapters, a decade later, in their massive 700-page study, *Crime and Human Nature* (1985), marking the culmination of what Wilson subsequently described as the “most intellectually exciting” period of his entire academic life.¹⁴³

After nearly twenty years of “thinking about crime” and its root causes, spurning the accepted sociological and economic explanations, Wilson and Herrnstein arrived at an explanation of their own.¹⁴⁴ “The idea is still controversial,” they announced, in the pages of the *New York Times*, a few weeks before the book’s release, “but increasingly to the old question ‘Are criminals born or made?’ the answer seems to be: both.”¹⁴⁵ The study’s main takeaway—that “constitutional factors” (that is, biology) contributed to criminality, or the propensity to commit crime—indeed stirred controversy.¹⁴⁶ Wilson did not care: “There is nothing (other than my children) that I am more proud of than *Crime and Human Nature*,” he wrote Herrnstein, in August 1994, as his friend lay dying of lung cancer.¹⁴⁷ A month later, he eulogized Herrnstein and publicly thanked “Students for a Democratic Society for having brought [them] together.”¹⁴⁸

One may well ask the same question—“born or made?”—of James Q. Wilson’s conservative turn in the 1960s. All available evidence points to the interaction of individuals and organizations: neoconservatives, like Wilson, were made, and not just by distant wars in Vietnam, or the Great Society’s social programs closer to home, but also by events that occurred right in their own backyard.

Retracing Wilson’s experiences running centers, committees, and departments at Harvard University helps broaden the study of the politics of knowledge. First, it explains why organized research units like the Joint Center did such a poor job keeping politics off campus. The Joint Center and the Center for International Affairs, like other “not-departments,” symbolized the academy’s capture by government and foundations and turned faculty into targets. Wilson was blindsided by this development, having naively believed that separating centers from departments, applied research from theoretical knowledge, and policy from professorial work, would inoculate him from scrutiny. What he discovered was that the division between departments and centers had closed, and new political divisions had opened, bringing an end to the era of expert deference.

Wilson’s story also shows the benefits of thinking broadly about the nature of intellectual life. He studied administration and was also an administrator, and he used his “other duties as assigned” to refine his thinking about organizations, incentives and disincentives, human behavior, and crime. Scholars can learn a lot by examining how routine administrative tasks that seemingly have little to do with research, and that are often seen as taking scholars away from their research, actually play a central role in the production of ideas.

And finally, this history identifies the modern university, during the height of liberal influence and the emergence of the New Left, as a wellspring of conservative thought and action. Harvard was where Wilson put all his theories under peer review and learned that politics

¹⁴³Wilson to Herrnstein, Aug. 8, 1994, PJQW; James Q. Wilson and Richard J. Herrnstein, *Crime and Human Nature* (New York, 1985).

¹⁴⁴Wilson, *Thinking About Crime*.

¹⁴⁵Richard J. Herrnstein and James Q. Wilson, “Made or Born? Evidence Indicates that Both Biological and Sociological Factors Play Roles,” *New York Times*, Aug. 4, 1985, SM31.

¹⁴⁶On its critical reception, see Lawrence E. Cohen, “Throwing Down the Gauntlet: A Challenge to the Relevance of Sociology for the Etiology of Criminal Behavior,” review of *Crime and Human Nature*, by James Q. Wilson and Richard J. Herrnstein, *Contemporary Sociology* 16, no. 2 (Mar. 1987): 202–5.

¹⁴⁷Wilson to Herrnstein, Aug. 8, 1994, PJQW.

¹⁴⁸Wilson, “Richard J. Herrnstein, 1930–1994,” PJQW. The Wilsons had two children, Matt and Annie.

and knowledge were inextricably personal. Although Wilson scoffed at the New Left's claim that "the personal is political," there can be no doubt that his own conservative transformation was influenced by the intimate friendships and intellectual partnerships of his adult life.

When he was a "young and giddy scholar," reminisced Wilson late in his career, he had hoped to discover "a comprehensive, systematic, and tested theory that really explains a lot of interesting things about a great variety of organizations." By his own humble admission, he never did. What he learned instead was that "organization matters," and that organizations shape and are shaped by the people who inhabit them. Wilson was one of those people affected by the organizations he worked in even if he failed fully to reshape Harvard. The lessons he learned as an administrator influenced his theoretical understanding of organizations and produced a body of work that continues to animate neoconservative thinkers—and that sheds light on one of the most fundamental questions posed by political theorists and intellectual historians: Where do ideas come from?¹⁴⁹

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¹⁴⁹James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* (1989; New York, 2000), xix, 14.