

*The Moral Basis of a Backward Society is a book by Edward C. Banfield, a political scientist who visited Montegrano, Italy (Montegrano is the fictitious name used by Banfield to protect the original town of Chiaromonte, in the Southern Italian region of Basilicata) in He observed a self-interested, family centric society which sacrificed the public good for the sake of nepotism and the immediate family.*

The author spent a year living there interviewing the locals. The society is shockingly poor -- most of the locals cannot read, people routinely go hungry, people lack adequate shoes and clothes. The unexpected death of a pig would be a calamity. When a rich person wants something carried, they can just wave down a peasant, who will do it without pay, just in the hopes of future gratuities or to avoid reprisal. But the town is by no means a feudal holdover, disconnected from the wider world. Some of the locals served in the Italian army; the upper classes typically went to school elsewhere, and so forth. There are radios and a cinema. The locals do know they are poor and backward, even compared to other places in Italy. And even semi-skilled labor would be helpful in establishing schools, poor relief, and so forth. Likewise, the agriculture is quite inefficient; people have whatever plots they inherit, often widely scattered, and make no attempt to consolidate them for ease of working. There are cars around, but nobody attempted to organize a carpool to the school for the children. As the author points out, comparably-small agricultural towns in the US are a lot more interested in self-improvement. Parallel towns the author mentions one in Utah would have newspapers, amateur theatricals, a chamber of commerce and so forth. They would be lobbying for government infrastructure projects and spending. So why not the Italians? The author ascribes to them a culture of "amoral familism" -- everybody, regardless of class is chiefly preoccupied with preventing their children from falling down the social scale. Everybody understands their neighbors to have this attitude, and so everybody expects that the politicians are on the take, the doctor is lying to them, and so forth. In consequence, nobody has enough trust in their neighbors to commit to joint civic projects. The book closes on a pessimistic note; the author is skeptical that conditions can be significantly improved although he does mention that government spending, importing northerners and similar interventions would help. This seems to have been falsified by history since the book was written. Southern Italy is still quite poor, but not to the same extent it was in the s. Apparently investment and splashing cash around was enough to get people somewhat out of their trap. That is, if the trap even existed. The author is looking at one moment in time, and acknowledges that much of what he sees is a society in transition away from subsistence agriculture. Family sizes are dropping, literacy rates are rising, and people are quite consciously trying to leave their children better off. I thought the book was well worth reading for its portrait of a society quite different from what I am used to. The book was written years ago and is more like a textbook these days as opinions differ as to the conclusions of Banfield. However, it is a must read for anyone interested in the poverty and social constrictions in southern Italy. Sep 02, Margaret Sankey rated it really liked it In an effort to conscientiously teach POL , I am revisiting classic development and political organization books and soliciting recommendations. This is a striking work of observation done in in the Potenza region of southern Italy--where, despite Marshall Plan money, a new road and the advent of technology like radios and better medicine, the population of about 3, people absolutely lacked any community institutions. They had no newspaper, no civil organizations, refused to contribute labor or money to the local orphanage, set up a community hospital, engage in any voluntary cooperation with the outsider carabinieri police and view all power as a zero-sum game in which anyone claiming to work for the group was clearly lying in order to personally benefit. Banfield defines this as "amoral familism," grounded in feudal land tenure which made an extended family disadvantageous, because only one son got anything and a very high parental mortality rate, producing a values system in which the nuclear family made decisions based on their own short-term gain--the classic "smart for one, dumb for all" calculation, which included

things like refusing to reorganize agriculture into more efficiently irrigated or worked fields, support better schooling for social mobility if it involved paying for something not immediately and personally beneficial or supporting whatever regional political candidates handed out free stuff. Although Banfield suggests policy recommendations, it is at such a level of cost and outside intervention that perhaps only several generations and vastly more contact with the larger world has wrought any change at all to a system that these people fiercely defended. From a sociological perspective, this book introduced some concepts. The first thing that struck me about the Southern Italian villagers who were the subject matter of this book was the similarity of their ethos to that of the village Iranians with whom I was reared. From a sociological perspective, this book introduced some concepts to which I had not been exposed: amoral familism, stem families and, importantly, tied the concepts into their effect on society at large, particularly governance and the economy. For the latter reason, I would recommend this book to anyone interested in local governance and local economic development. Many observations made are helpful even in a heterogenous society. It is a worthwhile and easy read.

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What explains all this? The way that American intellectuals and pundits tell the story goes like this: American politics became hyperpolarized. Why did that happen? If we are going to reckon with American collapse, we are going to have to understand American history better, more accurately, than merely pointing to short-term surface changes – we are going to have to learn that American collapse is in a way a culmination, not an anomaly. I will make the case, and you can be the judge. Does that sound fair? The generation born in the 60s was the first one which could ever really try to modernize America, bring it into line with modern notions of democracy, civilization, and prosperity, to make it what people would call a decent, working society. And the problem is that generation has failed at precisely that challenge, in abysmal, ruinous, and catastrophic ways. Until 1964, America was segregated. So America was – as much as you will object vehemently to me using the term – an apartheid state. It is an ugly and shameful word – but it is an accurate one. And we need accuracy, above all, if we are to understand America, and whether it has a chance, at this crucial juncture. That generation of Americans, then, the one born in the 60s, finally saw the joyous and historic lifting of something very much like an iron curtain. But just because an iron curtain lifts does not mean that the ruins smashed underneath have been rebuilt. The challenge of this generation was to unravel the old and unholy trinity of attitudes that had plagued and blighted America from the day it was born – naked, aggressive, economic self-interest, social superiority, and cultural cruelty. Only in that way could freedom, justice, and equality really be had, grow, endure, and multiply; only in that way could a modern society really be formed, shaped, and molded. The challenge was threefold. First, to create a more enlightened set of social attitudes, values, and goals, than people seeking safety in tribes – to create something more like a place of people who desired to be real equals. In fact, if we are really accurate, brutally accurate, America was becoming one of the most backwards societies in the world by any measure, really remember how more women are in political office even in Pakistan? But crucial to this project, perhaps, was the understanding that America was a backwards country – not an exceptionally successful one, but an exceptionally unsuccessful one. Would the leaders and elites of this generation be able to understand all that? Let me ask that another way. Why were these three changes – economic, social, and cultural – not just nice, or desirable, but necessary, urgent, crucial, in the strongest sense: Living standards would never really rise – they would peak, and then begin to fall. It would never be able to write European style rights to the very public goods above, and grow as a democracy – it would forever remain a stunted, decrepit, crippled thing, a sham democracy. People would go on seeking self-preservation, instead of self-realization, which can only really be had when we lift one another up. Nobody deserves any safety or protection or peace of mind! We are all just commodities in a capitalist machine, and the moment we are no longer profitable, it is right and just for it to dispose of us, like so much human waste – then quite naturally, people would eventually turn towards authoritarianism, perhaps even fascism. Capitalism had no interest in making proles rich – it never has, once in history – only in keeping them at the exact level of minimal, bitter subsistence, where it can exploit them most. And so the cultural attitude of cruelty, of callousness, of so prevalent in America, would mean that capitalism would inevitably degenerate into forms of social collapse like authoritarianism, as people turned on those below them, to seize by force the glittering possessions and lives that they had been promised – but never given. American living standards would peak, and then fall. Society would come undone as a result – people would grow resentful, hostile, and bitter. And authoritarianism and extremism would rise. American incomes flatlined in the 70s and never rose. And now life expectancy is falling, while suicide and depression rises – and authoritarianism and fascism explode what else do you call nooses in concentration camps, my friend? Let me put all that more simply. The same old tribal, supremacist attitudes which had always defined, pervaded, and molded America would simply continue to march on – and eventually, they would triumph. The very same group of Americans which has always desired to live above the rest, above the law, as superiors, not equals, demands

just that, all over again? America is still just the backwards place it has always been. All that tells us what is all too visible today. The generation born around the s was the first one really capable of modernizing America â€” but it failed, catastrophically, at that task. There is not a single thinker or intellectual of global renown within it. They went on debating whether capitalism, supremacy, and tribalism might in fact be wonderful and good things â€” while societies like Europe and Canada shook their heads, laughed, and built social democracies, in which people aspired not to be superiors, but genuine equals. Can we be a society of those things â€” and democratic, equal, and free, too? Or is there a hard choice that we must make now? And today we can see how badly that approach of compromise has failed. And worst of all, instead of equality, teaching people to hunger and desire to be genuine equals, it enshrined and glorified the notion that some people are worthier than others, and we should all devote our lives to the quest for superiority, with more status, bought with more money, won with more power, whatever the price to anyone else â€” instead of the gentle and graceful surrender to equality. Those three old fatal attitudes â€” economic self-interest, social superiority, and cultural cruelty â€” had never been changed at all. In fact, they had been hardened, shored up, patched right back together. History has always tried to teach this strange and stubborn land the very same thing: And yet here they are again, bickering over just that, as bitterly and resentfully and angrily as they have ever done, over supremacy, racism, bigotry, the right to be superior but not an equal, a master but not a slave â€” over tribalism, supremacy, and capitalism? With increasing violence and rancour every single day? In this way, my friends, America is an accursed place. Every nation has its own cross to bear, that much is true. But some of those nations find absolution and grace, by atoning for their sins. Maybe they are there to haunt us until we are undone by them.

**Chapter 3 : Society Quotes ( quotes)**

*This book developed out of some private reflections on the situation of the backward countries. Although no longer private, they remain purely personal. If occasionally they are critical, this is not because I fail to appreciate the difficulties that obstruct the progress of backward nations.*

The Impact of Immigration on American Society: In addition to teaching undergraduate and graduate courses on demography, immigration and ethnicity, and Southeast Asia, Hirschman conducts research on immigration and ethnicity in United States and on social change in Southeast Asia. There is a strong base of support for continued immigration as a necessary ingredient for economic growth and as an essential element of a cosmopolitan society among many Americans. Almost 60 million people—more than one fifth of the total population of the United States—are immigrants or the children of immigrants. Many opponents of immigration are old stock Americans who have all but forgotten their immigrant ancestors. They often live in small towns or in suburban areas, and many have relatively little contact with immigrant families in their neighborhoods, churches, and friendship networks. Beyond the debate over the economic consequences of immigration, there is also an emotional dimension that shapes sentiments toward immigration. Many Americans, like people everywhere, are more comfortable with the familiar than with change. They fear that newcomers with different languages, religions, and cultures are reluctant to assimilate to American society and to learn English. Although many of the perceptions and fears of old stock Americans about new immigrants are rooted in ignorance and prejudice, the fears of many Americans about the future are not entirely irrational. The news media often cite examples of industries that seek out low cost immigrant workers to replace native born workers. Some sectors, such as harvesting vegetables and fruits in agriculture, have very few native born Americans seeking jobs in them, but immigrants are also disproportionately employed in many other sectors, including meatpacking, construction, hospitals, and even in many areas of advanced study in research universities. These examples are fodder for unscrupulous political leaders who seek to exploit popular fears for their own ends. The current debates and hostility surrounding immigrants echo throughout American history. Not only have almost all immigrants or their descendants assimilated over time, but they have broadened American society in many positive ways. In this review, I discuss the popular fears about immigrants by old stock Americans and the historical record of immigrant contributions to the evolution of the industrial economy, political reform, and even to the development of American culture. In the century before the American revolution, there was a major wave of free and indentured labor from England and other parts of Europe as well as large scale importation of slaves from Africa and the Caribbean. Although some level of immigration has been continuous throughout American history, there have been two epochal periods: Each of these eras added more than 25 million immigrants, and the current wave is far from finished. During some of the peak years of immigration in the early s, about one million immigrants arrived annually, which was more than one percent of the total U. In the early 21st century, there have been a few years with more than one million legal immigrants, but with a total U. The first impact of immigration is demographic. The 70 million immigrants who have arrived since the founding of the republic formal records have only been kept since are responsible for the majority of the contemporary American population Gibson The one segment of the American population with the longest record of historical settlement is African Americans. Almost all African Americans are the descendants of 17th- or 18th-century arrivals Edmonston and Passell Early in the 20th century when immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe was at its peak, many old stock Americans sought to preserve the traditional image of the country as primarily composed of descendants from Northwest Europe, especially of English Protestant stock Baltzell There are no official figures on the numbers of American Indians prior to the late 19th century, but they were the dominant population of the 18th century in most of the territories that eventually became the United States. Estimates of the non-English-origin population in range from 20 to 40 percent Akenson ; McDonald and McDonald ; Purvis Throughout the 19th century, Irish and German Americans, especially Catholics, were not considered to be fully American in terms of culture or status by old stock Americans. In May , there were three days of rioting in Kensington, an Irish

suburb of Philadelphia, which culminated in the burning of two Catholic churches and other property Archdeacon

#### Chapter 4 : Society | The Guardian

*The society is shockingly poor -- most of the locals cannot read, people routinely go hungry, people lack adequate shoes and clothes. The unexpected death of a pig would be a calamity. When a rich person wants som This is an ethnography of a small town in Southern Italy in the s by an American political scientist.*

#### Chapter 5 : The Moral Basis of a Backward Society by Edward C. Banfield

*The Backwards Thinkers Society, Eau Claire, WI. likes. Improvisational Theatre & Comedy at The University of Wisconsin- Eau Claire.*

#### Chapter 6 : Backward Society Education Backward Society Education (BASE)

*Backward Society Education (BASE) is a nonprofit non-governmental organization that works with Tharu in Western Nepal to fight illiteracy, bonded labor from the Kamaiya system, and a number of other issues in the region.*

#### Chapter 7 : Oughtred Society Journal Back Issues.

*Note: Citations are based on reference standards. However, formatting rules can vary widely between applications and fields of interest or study. The specific requirements or preferences of your reviewing publisher, classroom teacher, institution or organization should be applied.*

#### Chapter 8 : The moral basis of a backward society - Edward C. Banfield - Google Books

*a society that happens to fall back instead of forward for example the roman empire made the dark ages, because there was no structure in europe everything fell to shambles; people formed small armies and roads of the former roman empire fell to disrepair basicaly there was no order to keep society together.*

#### Chapter 9 : The Moral Basis of a Backward Society - Wikipedia

*Other articles where The Moral Basis of a Backward Society is discussed: political science: Political culture: political culture study, Edward Banfield's The Moral Basis of a Backward Society (), argued that poverty in southern Italy grew out of a psychological inability to trust or to form associations beyond the immediate family, a finding that was long controversial but is now accepted by many.*