

Freedom and the City



There would be no West without both.

By Brian C. Anderson

CIVILIZATION AS WE KNOW IT is inseparable from urban life,” wrote Friedrich Hayek in his classic study *The Constitution of Liberty*, and by civilization he meant the *Western* kind. The Austrian economist viewed the city as the source of the West’s dynamic, world-transforming science, culture, and prosperity. The “bourgeois” values of civility and urbanity are also products of the city and ultimately (though Hayek did not develop this theme) it is to the city that we owe the liberty that has been embodied in our political, spiritual, and economic institutions. Simply put, without the city, no democracy, no Christianity, no capitalism, no West.

The city’s importance in Western civilization makes its long crisis deeply troubling. In the second half of the 20th century blight, crime, and ugliness have ravaged many American and European urban areas, and have reached them all. The crisis represents, I believe, a general loss of Western self-confidence; I will explore a few of its causes and point to some welcome signs of renewal.

THE WORD “POLITICS” DERIVES FROM “POLIS,” the Greek word for the city-state, of which Athens was the leading example. The “Greek miracle,” as Philippe Nemo describes it in his important recent book *What Is the West?*, was in essence political—the great philosophical and artistic achievements of the Athenians being a byproduct of their political freedom. The Greek city arose in the eighth century B.C. out of the ruins of the Mycenaean civilization, which had been based on divine kingship. Urban republics took the place of monarchy; participatory rule replaced the shadowy machinations of the royal palace. “The powers of ruling officials in the Greek City became an open, public matter,” writes Nemo—as is shown by the archaeological evidence of the Athenian *agora*, the public square where citizens would gather to deliberate about their communal ends. Religion, too, surrendered to the democratic city some of its social and moral authority, which

in archaic times had been absolute, unchanging, demanding complete submission. Why the agora happened when and where it did is anybody’s guess, since history records no earlier example. It does seem a kind of miracle, an irruption or mutation in the order of time. But happen it did.



In the agora, noble lineage or sacred position mattered less than a man’s debating skills, especially his ability to make persuasive arguments. Because any citizen, even the lowliest, could make such arguments, a new conception of the human person emerged—a conception that has been internalized by Western civilization. As Nemo puts it, we have inherited from Greek democracy the idea of “each one as the equal of all others, before the law, subject to law, and helping to write the law.” The aristocratic virtues associated with the era of Homeric kingship were increasingly seen as excessive and violent. Moderation and reason emerged as core values of the polis.

On a deeper level, the Greeks discovered the distinction between nature and convention—between *phusis* and *nomos*. Nature transcends the human will and constitutes the deep unalterable order of things;

convention, however, is man-made and therefore open to change and reform. There is a natural law, implanted in the heart of things, but the laws that govern social life are conventional; they can be debated and, if found wanting, changed. And this is the premise of politics as we in the West have known it—not submission to a law that is unquestioned and eternal, but the creation of a law of our own, by rational deliberation and consent. In this

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way the “civic pillars” of modern constitutional states—the rule of man-made law, democracy and self-government, the rights and responsibilities of citizenship—were first erected. They would fall in the late Roman era, only to be rediscovered by Italian city-states, and then by modern English philosophers and statesmen. When we speak of “Athens” as central to the idea of the West, it is this philosophical architecture we have in mind. (One should not neglect in this context, however, the importance of theatrical spectacle to the Greek mind and to the Western experience. The theater creates the sense of an individual, living out the consequences of his free choices, though trapped, too, in fates beyond his control. The absence of an Islamic theater may have something to do with the Islamists’ grim humorlessness, which reflects an inability to *see themselves from outside*, as we see actors in a drama.)

The Greek philosophers held life in the city to be the only one that accorded with man’s nature as a “political animal,” as Aristotle famously defined him. In fact Aristotle believed the city to be as natural as the family, and prior to it in importance. It is where a “rule of life” would make citizens “good and just” and help human beings to flourish. It is also of the right size—big enough that people could act collectively and have an effect on others, but not so big that citizens could not identify with one another, or love one another as friends.

Does such an understanding retain any meaning for modern constitutional democracies? The polis was a direct democracy, whose intrusions into private lives we would find unacceptably authoritarian; today, the will of the people leads to government action primarily by way of elected representatives. Moreover, contemporary thought, whether rightly or not, no longer accepts the Greek view that certain human ends are naturally superior to others. Human interests have become ever more varied, so that the notion of a common good is ever harder to conceive. Finally, our cities are not city-states in the old sense. They have long been subsumed by those larger sovereign bodies, nations, and many have become megacities, dwarfing in size even the largest urban centers of antiquity. The population of Athens at the height of its power, in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., was probably around 300,000, with perhaps 70,000 adult males contending in the agora—fewer than populate Staten Island, New York City’s smallest borough.

Nevertheless our cities remain in some sense moral and political communities. In his classic 1981 study, *The Philosopher in the City*, constitutional scholar Hadley Arkes reminded us that the policy concerns of cities unavoidably go far beyond street cleaning and traffic regulation to encompass “questions of moral judgment which are far more important for... citizens in establishing the kind of people they wish to be.” Cities answer such questions—on how to police and secure decent neighborhoods, how to educate children, how to encourage or discourage certain kinds of business, whether to tolerate “victimless” crimes like prostitution, and so on—in various ways. But in America it is still often local government, not the nation as a whole, that answers those questions. Hence without republican virtues urban life as we know it will wither.

THE OTHER PRIMAL SOURCE OF Western civilization also takes the shape of a city: Jerusalem, though maybe it would be more accurate to speak of Jerusalem as filtered through Rome. In his 2002 book *On Two Wings*, theologian Michael Novak argues that the political freedom of the Greek city would have had far less meaning without the triumph of “Jewish metaphysics.” One major dimension of that metaphysics, he explains, is the biblical “narrative of purpose and progress.” The pagan Greeks and Romans saw time as an inexorable cycle, repeating the same story again and again across mil-



lennia. By contrast, the Jews, and later the Christians, gave time a direction—a target. Time was seen as the dimension within which human liberty unfolds. It moves—though not inevitably, as reversals are certain—toward a new sacred kingdom, where love and justice will reign. Freedom matters in Jewish metaphysics, for it is what history is ultimately about: not political freedom only, as the Greeks had valued it, but inner freedom—the freedom of the will, which is (as the story of Genesis emphasizes) the foundation of the relationship between man and God.

“Liberty is the human condition established by the Bible, nearly every chapter of which turns upon the exercise of that freedom, as a wheel upon its axis,” Novak writes. “What will Adam, King David, Peter, Saul do next? Liberty is the axis of the universe, the ground of the possibility of love, human and divine.” Christianity would radicalize this emphasis on personal freedom, removing it from its communal context and extending it to all humanity. As a result, from the *Confessions* of St. Augustine to the novels of George Eliot and Henry James, personal liberty forms the *leitmotif* of Western literature. It is enshrined in our law, and especially in the common law of the English-speaking peoples, of which

we in America are the great beneficiaries. It makes accountability and responsibility fundamental to all social and political relations. It has produced forms of education that encourage creativity and self-development, rather than the submissive acceptance of routines.

These days we tend to look at history in the light of progress, the implicit goal of which is liberty. This attitude comes to us not from the Greeks or the Romans, or even from the Enlightenment, but, as Novak reminds us, “via the preaching of Jesus Christ, from whom the Gentiles learned the essential outlook of the Hebrews: that the Creator gave humans a special place among all other creatures, and made them free, and endowed them with incomparable responsibility and dignity.” This metaphysical contribution of the Jews and Christians would never have shaped the history of Western civilization, however, if Christianity had not become a successful urban movement in the Roman Empire. All effective missionary movements are or swiftly become urban, because missionaries need to go where there are many potential converts. Hence St. Paul’s journeys took in major cities such as Antioch, Corinth, and Athens, and only occasionally smaller communities like Iconium and Laodicea.



No record exists of Paul preaching the Gospel in the countryside, even though all but 5 percent of the Roman Empire's population then lived in rural areas. The city collects agglomerations of people big enough to make conversion worthwhile. Several Greco-Roman urban centers in the era of early Christianity had populations in excess of 100,000, with two, Rome and Alexandria, climbing past 200,000. This allowed reformers like Paul to reach a critical mass of potential converts, producing a viable subculture at odds with the prevailing norms of religious expression.

The evidence shows that by the time of Constantine's conversion in 312, Christians, having expanded to nine million in number, still made up only around 15 percent of the imperial population. However, almost all of them were urbanites, which greatly increased their political and communicative power. It was because their influence so far outstripped their numbers that Constantine sought the backing of the early church. The rest is history. But again: without cities, no Christendom—no West.

ECONOMIC HISTORIANS LIKE Robert Lopez, and more recently, Avner Greif, have situated the birth of capitalism not, as the anti-Catholic Max Weber did, in the Protestant north of Europe and the Hanseatic League, but in the city-states of Florence, Genoa, Venice, and other northern Italian urban centers during the Middle Ages. Emerging from an entropic Europe ravaged by barbarian invasions and Muslim ferocity, where Christian monks had kept the embers of classical civilization glowing,

these urban republics—the first to exist since the polis—forged an economic empire that stretched as far as England, southern Russia, the oases of the Sahara Desert, India, and China. The world had never seen its like: a commercial revolution that was, according to Lopez, “probably the greatest turning point in the history of our civilization.”

This commercial revolution dissolved the old feudal system, freed serfs, and elevated a new elite, based on wealth rather than lineage or family: the bourgeoisie. A new literature and art was born; science and law, educational and cultural institutions all grew as prosperity spread. The modern ideals of liberty and equality began their long historical movement through Western institutions. The capitalist West had arrived, six centuries before the British Industrial Revolution gave modernity its current form. Lopez points to the separation of management from ownership of firms, the ceaseless effort to make firms more competitive, the expansion of credit, the accumulation of capital, the quest for profit, and various other aspects of full-blown capitalism. As yet it all took place on a much smaller scale than would occur after the Industrial Revolution or during the rise of the global economy in the 20th century. And, as the word “bourgeois” conveys, it was an entirely urban phenomenon. But it was a decisive episode in the development of Western liberty.

What explains this commercial revolution? First, free cities are often hothouses of economic growth. Urbanist Jane Jacobs has contended, plausibly to my mind, that virtually *all* economic development since the dawn of time has been generated in cities. By packing together so many people, often from different backgrounds and boasting a great variety of skills, urban agglomerations offer radical economic efficiencies—in a big city like New York, you can quickly get your hands on almost *anything*. Dense populations also fire creativity and invention, the true engines of wealth. Think of the fusion foods, the cultural inventions, the technological marvels, and the cornucopia of new goods that dynamic cities regularly produce. These urban advantages of efficiency and creativity are key reasons people continue to flood into cities, despite the higher costs, both financial and stress-related, of urban life. More than half of the world's population is now urban, and this for a very good reason.

But there are other significant factors besides scale and variety. The Italian city-states transformed themselves into the West's first economic dynamos

largely because of the invention of effective, neutral institutions: banks, contracts, joint-stock companies, letters of credit, courts of appeal, and so on. These inventions established the framework for modern capitalism, by permitting trust between strangers, cooperation outside the family, and the ability of investors to secure assets.

That raises a second question, however: Why did these institutions arise first in the West? Greif, a professor at Stanford and a rising star of contemporary economic thought, argues that Western culture—the Western emphasis on the individual, born of Christianity—encouraged such innovations. Comparing the Christian Genoese with the Maghrebis, Jewish traders from North Africa who competed fiercely with the Italian city-states for economic control of the 12th-century Mediterranean, Greif shows how the Maghrebis' thicker tribal relations held them back economically. They could raise money only from within the community, not in a credit market, like the Genoese, and their trading networks were familial as well, which limited their size compared with their Christian competitors, whose beliefs allowed them to extend far wider networks of trust. Maghrebi conflicts were not adjudicated in neutral courts like those of Genoa, and often culminated in violence and permanent banishments. Over time, the Maghrebis' communitarian approach to economic life proved less efficient and more fragile than the Genoese fidelity to rational institutions and the rule of law. In Greif's view, the West's institutional history is a long story of creating substitutes for the ties of the tribal family in just this way. This process is unthinkable without Christianity's trust-creating and culture-forming influence.

A few years ago, social scientist Rodney Stark concluded his book *The Victory of Reason* by quoting a Chinese scholar, the Communist Party had tasked with leading a study group to understand the West's pre-eminence. "We studied everything we could from the historical, political, economic, and cultural perspective," the researcher said. "At first, we thought it was because you [the West] had more powerful guns than we had. Then we thought it was because you had the best political system. Next we focused on your economic system. But in the past 20 years, we have realized that the heart of your culture is your religion: Christianity. That is why the West is so powerful. The Christian moral foundation of social and cultural life was what made possible the emergence of capitalism and then the successful

transition to democratic politics. We don't have any doubts about this."

A closely related component of the West's civilizational genius was brought to life in the trading cities of northern Italy: urbanity. "City air brings freedom," went an old saying, dating from feudal times. In the nascent bourgeois cities, the personal bondage of feudalism dissolved, replaced by a new kind of solidarity among the traders and artisans, and soon among the lawyers, bankers, and others providing services to the proto-capitalist economy. This solidarity based itself, not on familial or religious obligation or on land ownership or birth in a

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caste or race, but instead on rational economic interests and a demand for autonomy that soon translated itself into political terms. This solidarity was the matrix of modern civil society, and the foundation of our democratic way of life.

This urban economic and civic culture offered citizens the chance to pursue material interests, to realize new rights and liberties, and to develop richer, more diverse personalities. We find this culture, at least a degree of it, wherever or whenever a Western city has since flourished. It arose only in the West, and Christianity's universalizing power is again the explanation. (Dutch social theorist Anton Zijderveld traces this story artfully in his 1998 book, *A Theory of Urbanity*.) That the culture of urbanity might also work to loosen city dwellers from the duties of Christian faith—from faith in general—and thereby undermine its own foundations has been an irony of Western history.

To talk about the culture of urbanity is to talk of the bourgeois virtues. These virtues—prudence, enterprise, fairness, hard work, sociability, honesty, thrift, self-possession, civility—are not those of the saint or the warrior. They stand to the warrior virtues as humility stands to pride. But by influencing and shaping the movements of the free economy, they have brought unprecedented prosperity, cooperation among strangers, social peace, and scientific

and cultural progress. In a fallen world, they are more than defensible; from the standpoint of social order, they are the best we have yet devised. Which is not to say that the virtues of the saint and the warrior are obsolete, for these too are needed if a society is to confront natural disasters and external threats.

THE 20TH CENTURY WITNESSED a brutal war on this social order and its imperfect decencies. The most destructive part of that war had its first stirrings much earlier, with Rousseau and the German Romantics, who despised the commercial pursuits and private interests of the modern city,

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seeing them as corrosive of organic community and its moral and symbolic traditions. For such critics bourgeois virtues were not virtues but corruptions. Even some of the American Founders were not exempt from these anti-urban suspicions. Thomas Jefferson, for instance, extolled farmers as “the chosen people of God if ever He had a chosen people,” the rock of republican government, very different from the urban “mobs,” who “add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body.” (Late in life Jefferson recognized America’s need for cities if the nation was to become a great manufacturing power and militarily protect its freedoms—nothing ever got built in the country—and he certainly knew how to enjoy Paris.) By the 19th century “bourgeois” had become, in the words of the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, “the most pejorative term of all, particularly in the mouths of socialists and artists, and later even of fascists.” The bourgeois is the villain of *The Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital*. And, as we know from the subsequent “anti-bourgeois” crimes of the communists and Nazis, this fomenting of hatred toward ordinary urban life had dreadful effects.

Leading the anti-bourgeois reaction have been many of the bourgeois themselves. Consider how many Marxists were the sons or daughters of bankers, lawyers, merchants, and others raised in the culture of urbanity: Marx and Engels themselves, then Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, György Lukács,

Herbert Marcuse—and many more, including today’s innumerable tenured radicals. Modern bourgeois democracy has a seemingly infinite capacity to produce offspring who detest the social and political regime that has secured their privileges.

François Furet addressed this paradox in his 1999 book, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century*, arguing that communism and fascism exploited two weaknesses in the civilization against which they rebelled. The first is the ideal of equality promised by the “bourgeois city,” as Furet dubbed the modern political and economic order. The bourgeois freedoms—to pursue wealth, to strive for happiness, and to forge one’s destiny—erode equality. We are not all born with the same propensities and talents, and not all of us have the same luck or the same family circumstances. Hence, although individual freedom means equal opportunities, it will for that very reason produce unequal outcomes. Communism promised to reach equality in a way that bourgeois society never could. All that was necessary was to crush a few political obstacles, and to eradicate the multiplicity of private ends. Contemporary left-liberals like John Rawls promise something similar, albeit in a less bloodthirsty way. Rawls even raises the prospect of genetic engineering to overcome natural differences, thereby building an egalitarian society on the principles of Huxley’s *Brave New World*.

The second fundamental weakness of the bourgeois city, Furet argues, is moral indeterminacy. The liberal political order that has emerged in the West downplays any extra-human dimension, whether natural or supernatural, that might provide firm answers to the ultimate questions of existence. Such existential questions instead become privatized, displaced from the governing sphere to that of culture. This frustrates a natural, but under modern conditions dangerous, impulse in man to see his highest aspirations and deepest meanings completely embodied in the central political authority, as they were, for instance, in the political institutions of Calvin’s Geneva.

Furet is keenly aware of the liberations secured by the bourgeois city, its unprecedented freedom from political tyranny and the dictatorship of poverty. But by contrast with movements that have sought to establish their highest ideals politically, such as communism, fascism, and Nazism, the bourgeois city has seemed to many to be thin, boring, alienating, and cold. Furet’s wise book warns the

citizens of the West to live with bourgeois imperfections. The alternatives, though perfectionist, are worse than imperfect; they are lethal.

And the bourgeois city has never been as alienating, as empty of meaning, as its critics on the left and right have charged. On the contrary. Consider Chicago. It is no utopia: it remains crime-plagued, its economy struggles at times, it has a stubbornly entrenched black underclass, and its politics are legendarily corrupt. Yet it is a functioning, living place, filled with the kind of meaningful community—the *gemeinschaftlich* attachments—that anti-urbanists claim the city invariably destroys. Economist Deirdre McCloskey, returning to Chicago after living in small Iowa City and smaller Granville, Ohio, runs through the Windy City’s community scorecard: “30 Episcopal churches within easy driving distance instead of four or five; 70 ethnic groups in bulk instead of two; 20 Irish pubs instead of one.” Sure, Chicago has lots of *Gesellschaft*, or rational, businesslike association, too, McCloskey adds—but that’s because a big city has more of *everything*. “That’s why there are so many people there,” she concludes.

THE BOURGEOIS CITY SURVIVED its struggle with totalitarianism—just visit post-communist Bratislava, say, or Kraków, and feel the energy on the streets, the bustle of commerce, the sense of possibility that surrounds you. But urban civilization has faced two other enemies whose impact has been ruinous, both in the U.S. and in Europe: the city planners and the liberal establishment.

During the post-World War II period, city planners throughout the West fatefully decided to remove their “slums,” seeing them as blighted anachronisms in a new rational age. Yet what were slums, argues philosopher Roger Scruton, but the “harmonious classical streets of affordable houses, seeded with local industries, corner shops, schools, and places of worship, that had made it possible for real communities to flourish in the center of our towns”? Poor they might have been, but they were alive and actively reproducing themselves.

In place of the slums came something far worse: the modernist high-rise housing project, surrounded by empty, wind-swept plazas. Right out of the dark imaginings of Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius, the projects immediately became forces for social



breakdown and disorder. All public buildings would henceforth be modernist, too, lacking facades and jarringly unlike their older architectural neighbors. Making matters worse, new “rational” zoning regulations now separated what had always gone together: offices would go up in one part of the city, shopping in another, residences in yet another. As Jane Jacobs argued in her classic *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, these developments robbed neighborhoods of their round-the-clock vitality, in which someone always was at home or at work and could watch the street for signs of trouble or offer a helping

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hand when needed. Now, zoned for different purposes, whole sections of the city would remain all but uninhabited for parts of the day, save for predators and outlaws. One need only look at ravaged downtown Detroit, throbbing with menace and alienation, to see what the planners and their architect allies helped bring about.

From the 1950s on, as the dark and faceless towers rose up, middle-class families, empowered by the automobile, began fleeing in droves for the suburbs, draining cities of civic and economic vitality. The sprawling suburbanites weren’t just fleeing the planners and modernist architects, however, but the 20th century’s third anti-urban force: the social policies of the left-liberal establishment.

It is hard to overestimate the damage liberals did to the bourgeois city, to urbanity, and thus to the essence of Western civilization itself, beginning in the 1960s. The left-liberals of that decade believed that America (Amerika, as they had it) was a deeply unjust country built on racist attitudes, and that aggressive government action was necessary to lift up the poor and especially poor blacks, who had crowded into cities after World War II; no free market could do the job. As a result of this belief, cities became the breeding ground for a demoralized underclass. Welfare payments undermined self-reliance; passive policing encouraged crime; and schools,

given over to Deweyite goals of self-expression and self-esteem, enabled children to leave for the streets, with their ignorance and malice intact.

Not only did these measures fail to help the poor; they made cities less and less livable. New York, America’s biggest and greatest city, was hardest hit. A liberal-imposed fear of offending minorities, combined with a belief that crime was environmental, so that nothing could really be done about it unless all social problems could be solved first, so hampered law enforcement that whole swathes of the city were left wild zones. Felonies became endemic, scaling to hundreds of thousands a year, with murders hitting a grim high in 1990 of 2,262. Much of the crime was black preying on black, but the whole city suffered.

Welfare programs in the city aggressively signed up every poor person in sight, spurred on by academics like Columbia University’s Richard Cloward and City University’s Frances Fox Piven, who saw the local public-aid system as the cornerstone of urban life, and who sought to lay the foundations for a nationwide welfare state. The welfare rolls exceeded one million under liberal Republican mayor John Lindsay in 1972 and reached an all-time high of 1.1 million in 1995, under liberal Democratic mayor David Dinkins. The result, as everyone but the blindest ideologue knows, was a human catastrophe: a culture of permanent government dependency that robbed whole generations of the future. Life on the dole accelerated the breakdown of the black family (some neighborhoods saw illegitimacy rates go past 90 percent)—a result that was further encouraged by the ceaseless liberal campaign to demoralize sexual relations and delegitimize old-fashioned mother-father-children families. Single-parent families, with reduced emotional and financial resources, were more likely to be dependent on welfare, closing the no-exit loop. As Irving Kristol once put it: the “welfare trap” had sprung.

The city’s public schools were not going to help anyone escape the trap. Controlled by monolithic and self-interested teachers’ unions, their officials propagated failed pedagogies and shrugged as minority students dropped out at alarming rates. New York began spending much more than it could afford, and it drove up taxes to business-killing levels. The city lost most of its Fortune 500 companies, which left for more economically hospitable climes. Movies like *Taxi Driver* and *Escape from New York* started to depict Gotham not as a place where dreams could be made real but as a modern-day Inferno, populated by

lost souls and soulless killers. The title of historian Fred Siegel's great book on the urban crisis, *The Future Once Happened Here*, captured the widespread sense that New York had become ungovernable, had exhausted its life force, and would soon expire. Nor did the crisis affect only New York. For a while, it seemed as though the bourgeois city were finished.

THANKFULLY, THAT HASN'T HAPPENED, at least not yet. The 1990s, as Siegel and others have brilliantly documented, saw a breathtaking rebirth of urbanity. New York led the way out of the urban crisis, just as it had led the way in. Under Mayor Rudy Giuliani and his police commissioner William Bratton, New York said "enough" to high crime. Cracking down on low-level offenses like aggressive panhandling and prostitution, under the assumption that tolerating such "victimless" crimes encourages more serious criminals to act on their baser impulses, and employing sophisticated computers to map crime while holding police commanders responsible for real crime-reduction results, Bratton's NYPD pulled off the greatest policy success story of the postwar era: a complete turnaround on crime. Felonies plummeted during the Giuliani years, and have continued to fall under Mayor Michael Bloomberg, whose top cop, Ray Kelly, has kept in place the older reforms and added some of his own. In fact, serious crimes are down 77 percent, murder included, since the Dinkins-era peak.

Emboldened by the Welfare Reform Act of 1996, which ended the federal entitlement to welfare, Giuliani energetically slashed the welfare rolls, which have also continued to shrink under his successor—down to 345,000 at present, the lowest number since October 1963. Mayor Giuliani also cut some taxes, the first time that had happened in the city for many years (though, alas, Bloomberg has raised taxes since). The lowered crime, slashed welfare rolls, and more friendly business environment enabled the renewal of New York City's economy. People began to talk about how pleasant life in the big city could be. Blacks have benefited perhaps most of all, with once-blighted neighborhoods in Harlem and the Bronx buzzing with investment and growth. Not even the worst day in the city's history, September 11, 2001, could derail the recovery. Even the city planners have become more sensible, at last recognizing the worth of Jacobs-style mixed-use zoning, though the reign of architectural modernism has yet

to end, with architects like Frank Gehry and Daniel Libeskind still dominating the competitions.

New York's experience shows that the bourgeois city is not fated to extinction. European cities, whose crime rates, other than for murder, are today generally higher than those of U.S. cities, show signs of learning these lessons too. Yet the revolution is far from complete and victories remain precarious.

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Middle-class families have started to trickle back into urban areas, but high taxes and unacceptable public schools stand as obstacles to further renewal. The crime turnaround demands perpetual vigilance. And left-wing "community organizers" and interest groups work night and day to bring back the ruinous policies of the liberal era. Worse, they now have their national candidate: Barack Obama, a man wedded to a refuted conception of the city and its needs.

Conservatives, too often dismissive of cities as left-wing satrapies, need to stand up to this liberal reaction. In so doing, they would be defending the vision of the city that has come down to us from Athens, Jerusalem, Rome, and Genoa. This vision distinguishes Western civilization and provides us with our highest political ideal: a society of free citizens, bound together by consent, and governed by a law of which they themselves are the authors. Hayek was right: civilization as we know it is inseparable from urban life. 🗽

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