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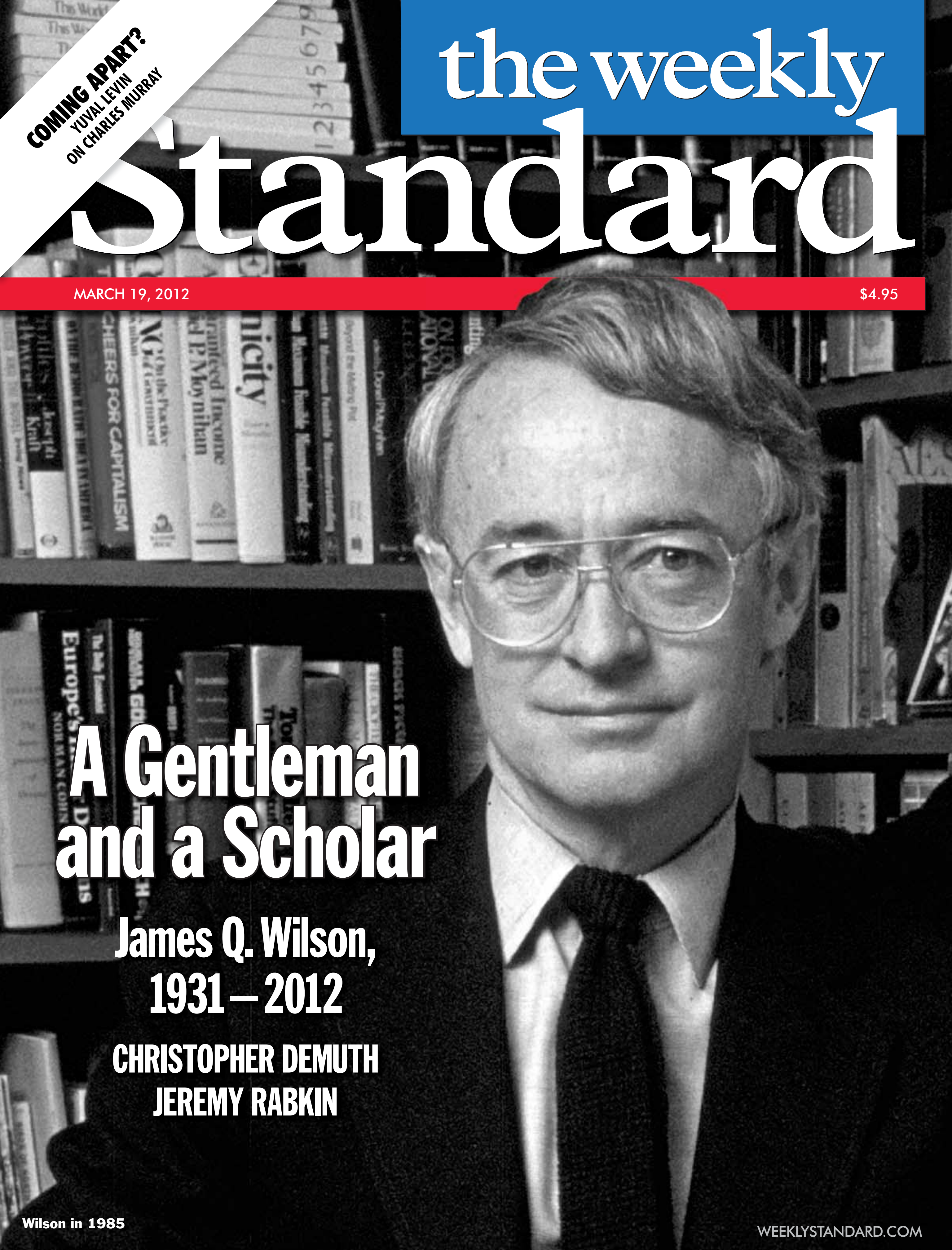

A Gentleman and a Scholar

James Q. Wilson, 1931–2012

CHRISTOPHER DEMUTH
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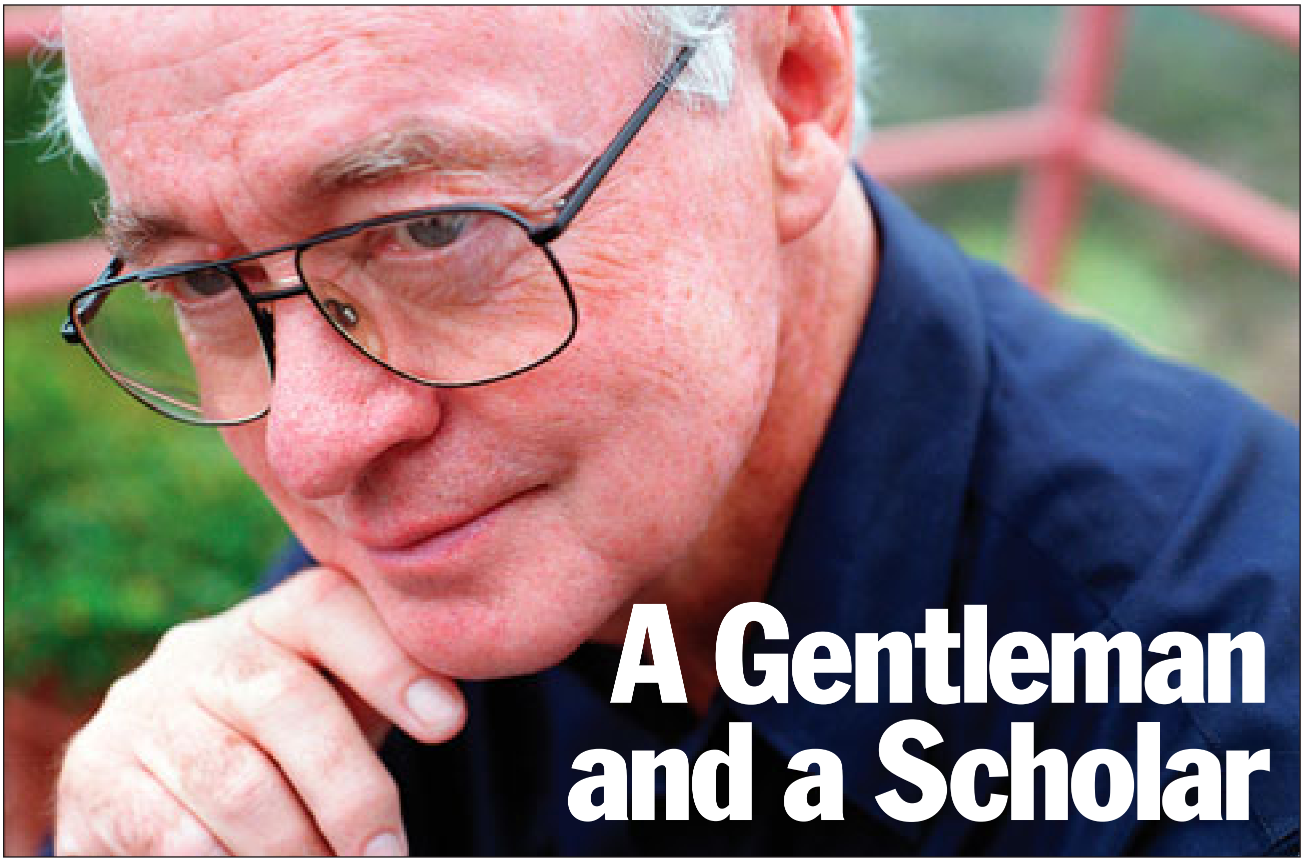
Wilson in 1985



A Gentleman and a Scholar

James Q. Wilson, 1931-2012

By Christopher DeMuth

I got up my nerve to introduce myself to James Q. Wilson when I was a Harvard junior casting around for a senior thesis topic. I approached his office in Harvard's Littauer Center daunted and therefore well prepared. Littauer was then (1967) home to a dazzling array of pathbreaking thinkers and celebrity scholars, including Henry Kissinger, John Kenneth Galbraith, Samuel Huntington, Thomas Schelling, and Edward C. Banfield, with the ed school's Daniel P. Moynihan a frequent visitor from just across the Cambridge Common. Wilson—at 36 the youngest full professor in the Department of Government—was already a standout in that company. He had been director of the MIT-Harvard Joint Center for Urban Studies for several years, and was emerging as a leading light of the *Public Interest* circle of intellectual revolutionaries. He had recently published, with Banfield, *City Politics*, recognized as a landmark of political analysis the day it appeared.

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But I was interested in Wilson's earlier books, *Negro Politics* and *The Amateur Democrat*, written when he was a newly minted Ph.D. at the University of Chicago. I had had some involvement in black politics (and, I hereby confess, community organizing) in Chicago, and wanted to use my experience as a "participant-observer" as the basis for my thesis. I would employ Wilson's methods and typologies and extend his findings to a period when the trend he had identified in *Negro Politics*—the displacement of patronage politics by racial politics—had proceeded much further.

Jim was crisp and businesslike, hearing me out intently and responding with cordial criticism and several suggestions for further study. No, he could not be my thesis adviser—because he was already overcommitted, and anyway he wanted to be the faculty reader who would grade the thesis when it was done (gulp). As the interview was winding up, I managed to work in a few impressive analogies between his books and the works of earlier political scientists. "That's right," he concluded cheerfully as he ushered me to the door. "We don't know much in this business—but what we do know, we keep repeating."

That, I would come to learn, was quintessential James Q. Wilson. It was agreeable ("that's right" was

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one of his favorite openings), modest, plainspoken, and witty. But then one realized that he had said something important—in this case, crystallizing his realism about the capacities of social science and his conviction that the growth of knowledge is, at best, incremental and laborious. Even an undergraduate could play the J. K. Galbraith game—a sweeping, radical thesis, supported by a few clips from the *New York Times* and quips from Thorstein Veblen. The Wilson game was infinitely harder, demanding careful study and actual data from empirical measurement and field research, applied at just the right level of theoretical generalization for the problem at hand, to produce a small but confident improvement over what had been understood before. Wilson himself was engaged in numerous such games simultaneously, on subjects ranging from metropolitan development to party politics, from voting behavior to crime control, aiming to discover new knowledge that could help alleviate (he would never say solve) important social problems. He was a busy man and most of all a serious man. Younger men with serious aspirations wanted to figure out how to be like him, and knew it would not be easy.

Wilson worked on subjects ranging from party politics to crime control, aiming to discover new knowledge that could help alleviate (he would never say solve) important social problems.

That was the early phase of an intellectual career that would span 52 years (Jim's last essay, on taxation and income distribution, was written in the teeth of worsening health and ran in the *Washington Post* a month before his death). As his fame increased, he acquired a reputation as the most restrained, punctilious, empirically grounded of public intellectuals. And it is true that Jim cherished the norms of academic life, sometimes to the point of starchiness. In the late 1960s, he was finishing a lengthy study of how the organization of police departments affected the conduct and effectiveness of patrolmen on the front lines. His mentor and friend Edward Banfield, who had once been a journalist, had a terrific idea for a title: *The Bureaucrat on the Beat*. Jim was appalled, and titled his book *Varieties of Police Behavior*. Yet he was not at all the timid academic who sticks close to the literature and reports new data with a minimum of interpretation. His writings in magazines and newspapers were distinguished for their lucid summaries of research findings from political science, economics, psychology, ethnography, genetics, and other academic fields. But the key to his intellectual influence (actually one of two keys—I'll get to the other one later) lay elsewhere. It was his Tocqueville-like talent for creative observation and inspired interpretation and argument. As Wilson's sometime coauthor Karlyn Bowman puts it, he had "an eye for the piquant detail." He saw things that others did not see, whether he was reading a journal article, conducting a field interview, or following the news, sports, literature, the arts, or popular culture high and low (all of which he did avidly). And he made the most of what he saw.

Consider Jim's most celebrated policy article, "Broken Windows," written with George L. Kelling and published in 1982 in the *Atlantic*. The essay is conventionally treated as timely elaboration on an academic study which had found that, when an abandoned automobile had a single smashed window, it would soon be thoroughly vandalized. In fact, the article was based on a rejection of widely accepted findings, from careful empirical research, that putting police officers on foot patrols (rather than in patrol cars) had no effect on crime rates. That may be so, Wilson and Kelling wrote, in the short run in a neighborhood already wracked by violent crime. But it missed a larger and more important consideration: that the safety of a neighborhood is more than a matter of arrest rates, and depends ultimately on whether elementary norms of public conduct are being observed, so that residents feel secure in being out and about, which is good in itself and will in time lead to reduced violent crime as well. The broken windows study was introduced to illustrate the authors' contention that people's conduct is strongly influenced by their perception of the conduct of others in the immediate community. It was employed—along with other studies, discursive writings, history, illustrations from everyday life, appeals to logic and intuition, and persuasive rhetoric—to argue that the mission of policing ought to be expanded from crime-fighting to order-maintenance. The essay that launched a transformation in police practices (eventually cleaning up Times Square and other bellwether urban precincts) was not a popularization of research findings—the research findings pointed every which way. Rather it was an inspired, original proposition, constructed with fresh interpretations of selected research findings in tandem with other tools of understanding and exposition.

Here is another instance of Wilson's tremendous native perspicacity. In "A Guide to Reagan Country: The Political Culture of Southern California" (*Commentary*, May 1967), he set out to explain to his liberal Eastern friends the disturbing recent political developments in California. Ronald Reagan had just been elected governor in a landslide, and Jim called the phenomenon "Reaganism" (he may have coined the term). The assertive conservatism that Reagan embodied was not, he explained, a product of rootlessness, social alienation, bigotry, Birchite paranoia, or lotus-land selfishness, as so many pundits and intellectuals supposed. To the contrary, it expressed a new, thoroughly democratic political ethos that had developed among internal migrants, mainly (like Reagan himself) from the American heartland. They had come to Southern California in pursuit of happiness, and they were the opposite of rootless malcontents: They were the home-owning, upwardly mobile, newly middle-class bourgeoisie. "They are," Jim wrote, "acquiring security, education, living space, and a life style that is based in its day-to-day routine on gentility, courtesy, hospitality, virtue."

The essay's primary source was biography: Jim's own boyhood and adolescence in Long Beach in the 1930s and 1940s, which he drew upon with a novelist's flair for synecdoche. He elaborated with data on migration patterns and demographic trends and interpretations of recent political history. He did not cite a single academic study. He did, however, apply what he had learned in writing *The Amateur Democrat*, which had analyzed the rise of issues-oriented political activists in Los Angeles and other cities (this was the first of innumerable cases to come where he would use his own academic research to illuminate a new development in politics or policy).


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Wilson in Boston, 1972

"Reagan Country" identified three central characteristics of Reaganism. First, the new conservatives were democratic individualists. They saw themselves as self-reliant, law-abiding individuals; their attachments were to a place and a way of life rather than to a religious or ethnic group or any other social establishment; they conceived of politics as the aggregation of individual interests and values, not the mobilization of groups or the machinations of governing elites. Second, they were future-oriented, pro-growth, and pro-business. They had worked hard, tasted prosperity, and enjoyed personal freedom; they wanted more of all three, and understood that defenders of the status quo and proponents of "something for nothing," and the politicians and agencies that served their interests, were a threat to the continued advance of prosperity and freedom. Third, their deepest political concern was not with their own lot but with the lot of the nation. "The very virtues they have and practice are, in their eyes, conspicuously absent from society as a whole"—evidenced by rising crime, juvenile delinquency, and public lewdness, declining standards in schools and universities, and corrupt, manipulative politics.

There, right there on the printed page in 1967, was a precise, accurate prophecy of the coming transformation of American politics—down to the seemingly contradictory combination of pro-growth "economic conservatism" and pro-family "social conservatism," an amalgam that would come to define, and often vex, a newly populist Republican party. Wilson was not (yet) either an economic or social conservative, and was particularly worried about the introduction of "values" issues into politics and their definition in terms of personal morality. Personal morality was traditionally the dominion of religious institutions and the family; and, because moral issues resisted practical compromise, the political establishment (the parties, the labor unions, the Chamber of Commerce) worked assiduously to keep them out of politics. But all of those institutions were becoming weaker, and Southern California, where the political establishment was already relatively weak, was showing where that was leading. Surprisingly, it was turning out that, in politics, individualism and moralism go hand in hand (many liberals still haven't figured this out, and continue to believe that the Republican coalescence of social and economic conservatism is a cynical alliance of distinct, antithetical groups). Wilson concluded: "I fear for the time when politics is seized with the issue [of morality]. Our system of government cannot handle matters of that sort (can any democratic system?) and it may be torn apart by the effort."

Over the subsequent 45 years, Jim produced a dozen major books, at least another dozen edited volumes, and many hundreds of essays in scholarly journals and opinion magazines and on newspaper op-ed pages. No adequate bibliography of his publications yet exists, but Amazon features a reasonably complete listing of his books, the websites of his three favorite journals—*National Affairs* (incorporating the archives of the *Public Interest*), *Commentary*, and *City Journal*—have posted many of his most important essays, and the American Enterprise Institute has published two excellent essay collections, *On Character* (1995) and *American Politics, Then and Now* (2010).

The range of Wilson's output is as vast as its volume. His work may, however, be usefully organized into four categories (in homage to his own diligent typologizing):

• *American politics.* Here Wilson analyzes the changes foreshadowed in "Reagan Country" and many related developments: the disestablishment of traditional political hierarchies (parties, city machines, congressional committees); the growing importance of the media, polling, and "policy intellectuals"; the rise of issue-oriented (typically single-issue-oriented) membership organizations; the increasing openness of legislatures, bureaucracies, and even courts to outside influence; the transformation of career politicians into individual entrepreneurs; and polarization. A recurring theme is the diffusion and eventual triumph of the idea that the purpose of politics and government is to identify and solve problems rather than to forge tolerable compromises among conflicting interests. Much of this work is to be found in the websites and essay collections mentioned earlier. It all comes together in his superb college textbook, *American Government*, first published in 1981, now in its thirteenth and best edition, coauthored with John J. DiIulio Jr. and Meena Bose.

• *Public policy.* Wilson contributed significantly to virtually every important policy debate, including those over regulation, environmental protection, taxation, transportation, and entitlement policies. But he focused on the most difficult and contentious problems—crime first and foremost (where his two classics are *Thinking About Crime*, 1975, and *Crime and Human Nature*, with Richard J. Herrnstein, 1985), and also drugs, terrorism, welfare, schooling, and intelligence gathering. Throughout, he sought to introduce the best social science research and scholarly thinking into the conduct of policy (and to debunk mediocre research and mischievous nostrums). This he did with brilliance and unfailing good judgment, such that he was frequently called upon, formally and informally, to assist with the most momentous and difficult decisions at the highest levels of government.

Yet the strongest recurring theme of his policy work is the limits of expertise. Social science knowledge is always incomplete, and always limited in its practical application by the simplifying assumptions of each specialized field. Such knowledge may help clarify questions of cause and effect, and thereby narrow political disagreements, but it can never eliminate those disagreements. Economists will probably never prove that the death penalty is, or is not, a cost-effective deterrent—but even if they do, that will not settle disagreements over the penalty as just retribution for heinous crimes. Wilson counsels precision in the definition of policy goals, modesty in claims of policy success, and continuous trial-and-error experimentation in the administration of government programs. This advice, he points out, runs directly counter to the expectations of modern politics and the incentives of political activists, elected officials, and government administrators.

• *Organization.* Wilson was concerned from the beginning of his career with the role of organization in politics and government. Politics is ultimately a question of mobilization: People involve themselves in politics from a variety of material and ideological motives, different motivations dictate different forms of organization, and the resulting forms may or not be effective in pursuing the sorts of policies that motivated the members in the first place. Jim developed this schematic, worked out its implications, and used it to explain observed patterns of political action, first in *Negro Politics* and *The Amateur Democrat* and then, comprehensively, in the fine *Political Organizations* (1973).

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In government itself, policy is profoundly affected by organization, and organization is politically constrained and problematic. These ideas were initially developed and applied in *Varieties of Police Behavior*, and then fully realized in *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* (1989), which is one of Wilson's best books. Government bureaucracies are, of course, different from business corporations (no matter how big and bureaucratic) in that their output is not sold in a market; they lack the drive of economic competition and the objective performance measure of a financial bottom line. But, Wilson showed, bureaucratic performance is affected by many equally important factors intrinsic to the political world. Legislators may give agencies goals that are very broad or vague or inherently unachievable. Agencies may combine tasks that are in conflict, or that involve different sorts of knowledge and training, or that require different internal cultures. The incentives of political officials and senior managers may be disconnected from those of front-line workers. One can specify the conditions of improved bureaucratic performance, but political considerations may rule them out. Still, when the conditions are met, huge government bureaucracies can perform miracles. "One can stand on the deck of an aircraft carrier during night flight operations and watch two thousand nineteen-year-old boys faultlessly operate one of the most complex organizational systems ever created."

• *Conduct, culture, and character.* Although Wilson was, as we have seen, highly apprehensive about the entry of issues of private morality and conduct into the political sphere, he threw himself into the task of managing the fractious political divisions that he had foreseen would result. Moreover, beginning in the 1970s, there was a tremendous deterioration of objective circumstances in three traditional fields of government and politics—crime, primary and secondary education, and the provision of welfare to the poor. These problems were increasingly seen as problems of character formation and cultural norms (rather than simply economic incentives). Jim agreed. From the 1980s on, he was increasingly concerned with the dilemmas of individual character and family stability in modern America, and with what the government might plausibly do to improve matters or at least stop making them worse. His essays may be found on the websites and in the *On Character* collection mentioned earlier. His major books were *The Moral Sense* (1993) and *The Marriage Problem: How Our Culture Has Weakened Families* (2002).

The Moral Sense towers tall and apart on the Wilson skyline. It seems not to be about politics or policy at all. Its subject is benevolence: how self-interested human beings come to consider and promote the welfare of others, even when doing so is costly to themselves. This he calls the moral *sense* to emphasize its weakness and vulnerability among human motivations—it is "a small candle flame . . . flickering and sputtering in the strong winds of power and passion, greed and ideology." He is dissatisfied with the neo-Darwinian explanations of "reciprocal altruism," because people often act on their moral sense when others cannot reciprocate and when no one is even aware of what has transpired. The moral sense, Wilson demonstrates, is genuinely altruistic, and it originates in the family. The human child is utterly helpless for a long period, and then must be instructed on how to behave cooperatively within the family. Children are weaned from their natural self-centeredness by being taught to share with siblings and to respect their elders. Family socialization nurtures sympathy—the capacity to imagine oneself in the position of others and identify with their interests. That capacity is then progressively extended, partially and contingently, to relatives, neighbors, friends, group mates, colleagues, and even strangers.

The Moral Sense is a great work, certain to endure. It really does merit its frequent comparison to Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. It is the fullest realization of Wilson's inspired, capacious scholarship—here beginning with the philosophic accomplishments of Aristotle and Smith, then extending and modifying them with an astounding exegesis of hundreds of subsequent works of philosophy and history and of contemporary social and natural science. And, as Wilson's thesis takes shape, the reader begins to realize that it is, in fact, highly relevant to politics and policy. Politics is heavily dependent on action for the polity as a whole—from voting to statesmanship to the enormous personal sacrifices required to run for president, which dissuade many seemingly worthy prospects (one of Wilson's first scholarly publications was a paper with Edward C. Banfield titled "Public-Regardingness as a Value Premise in Voting Behavior"). More important, public policy is heavily dependent on the family. The breakdown of the family in contemporary America, it is increasingly clear, is a fundamental cause of social disorders, from drug addiction to declining educational attainment to welfare dependency, which government can affect only very imperfectly and at great cost. If the family is the source of moral sensibility and good character, then it is the sine qua non of effective politics and policy.

Wilson (right) with Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago, at a 1964 Harvard forum

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A particularly striking policy application of *The Moral Sense* came a year after its publication, in Wilson's essay "On Abortion" (*Commentary*, January 1994). The abortion legalization movement had long rested its case on freedom of choice: Abortion is a matter of private morality and should therefore be left to individual discretion. Wilson took the moral choice approach and made it his own. Morality, he had argued in *The Moral Sense*, is grounded in sympathy, and sympathy originates in familial relations. One might not be able to pronounce with metaphysical certainty or public consensus when a fetus has acquired a "right to life," but one could determine when it had acquired the moral sympathy of its expectant mother, such that she would choose to give birth and raise it rather than proceed with an abortion. The difficulty was that the fetus was shrouded in darkness and insensible to its mother until long after it had developed human characteristics. But that was changing. It was now possible to produce high-quality photographs, and even movies, of the fetus at progressive stages of development. Visual familiarity would reveal, more fully than had previously been possible, the strength of the bonds of sympathy the mother feels with her nascent child, and thereby enable her to make a more fully informed moral choice. Wilson concluded: "Many women, perhaps most, already treat this matter as a morally grave issue, but many do not—it is for them a form of birth control—and even those who do may not always clearly see, and thus fully sense, what is at stake. Let them see it."

My summary of Jim Wilson's 50 years of scholarship and writing cannot possibly do them justice. *The Moral Sense* and *Bureaucracy*, in particular, one must read in full to appreciate their power and depth, and both repay the most careful study. But my summary does provide a basis for explaining the single most compelling feature of Jim's work and (as promised earlier) the second key to his intellectual influence. This is its thoroughly democratic character. It may be said that everything he did was of democracy, for democracy, and by a democrat.

It was of democracy in being concerned with the forms of political action that arise in a modern, affluent, educated, wired, fractious, continental democracy, and with the dilemmas that arise when the ethos of individual sovereignty has swept away many traditional restraints on government action and private conduct. It was for democracy in that Jim applied his immense erudition to helping democratic leaders and citizens understand the constraints on government and the realistic possibilities of improvement. One of the great problems of modern democracy is the growth and specialization of knowledge: The individual citizen comprehends an increasingly tiny sliver of the exploding sum total of knowledge, yet is asked to form opinions on a lengthening list of large, complex subjects, many of them remote from everyday experience. Jim knew that his special talents put him in a position to help with this problem, by telling his fellow citizens what the best academic research was discovering, and what practical use might be made of it. He offered abundant earnest policy advice, the sort of thing academic political scientists tend to look down upon. His every account and interpretation of scientific findings was written with an eye to its interest to the inquiring citizen and its usefulness to the democratic leader.

And the man who rendered those services was himself a compleat democrat. Jim never once pulled rank on the reader. His writing was conversational—self-assured but never august, teachy but never preachy. He spoke person to person, appealing to his readers' intuitions, suggesting where social science fortified those intuitions and where it showed them to be mistaken. He knew that his readers might bring liberal or conservative predispositions to the conversation, and addressed them in turn. He had his own opinions, of course, often strong ones, and when circumstances warranted he was a fearsome intellectual pugilist. (His treatment of Ronald Dworkin in his abortion essay, and his widely noted reviews of David Stockman's and Edmund Morris's books on Ronald Reagan, were civil, judicious, and devastating.) But he respected his readers' opinions, always giving them sufficient information to make up their own minds.

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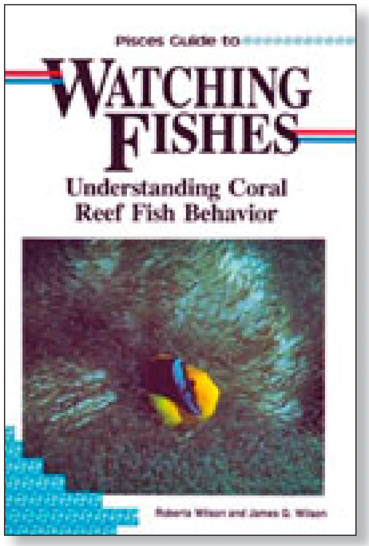
The Moral Sense and "On Abortion" are particularly notable in these respects. *The Moral Sense* democratized morality. Man's moral nature may be a matter of divine dispensation and may entitle him to natural rights, but its secular provenance is homey and familiar, in the conventional rituals of family life. Drawing on that view, "On Abortion" suggested a pragmatic step forward in an area where other moral conceptions (one of them enforced by the Supreme Court) had stood in the way of compromise. Pro-life and pro-choice leaders and natural-law theorists roundly denounced "let them see it." But it was Wilson, not the political activists, much less the academic philosophers, who had his hand on the democratic pulse. In the years since "On Abortion," sonogram technology has progressed dramatically. It is now routine for expectant moms to get high-resolution pictures of their fetuses at various stages of development. Many of them now prepare a custom video, with a soundtrack of popular music synchronized with the fetus's movements, to share with friends by email or on Facebook; this will soon be as customary as a baby shower. Twenty states have enacted laws encouraging doctors, including abortionists, to provide pregnant women with sonograms. Preliminary research suggests that these practices are lowering the abortion rate. Wilson would be the first to note that the evidence is scattered and preliminary, but it is more than plausible. Technology and popular culture are expanding the range of the moral sense. In time it may extend to unmarried fathers as well.

Jim's democratic character led to his interest in politics and his devotion to the survival and success of American democracy. It also led him to a matter-of-fact understanding of democracy's hazards. If there is a single epitaph to his career, it is the final chapter in his final book publication, the thirteenth edition of *American Government*. In "Who Governs? To What Ends?" Jim and his coauthors are talking to, but not down to, college students. They want their young readers to consider a dilemma that had probably never occurred to them: that the expansion of American democracy was making democracy weaker in important respects. As politics has become more democratic, expectations of government have increased. Whereas government used to do a few things, it now does a great many things—all of them promoted by well-organized groups who conceive their interests in terms of rights. As a result, elected leaders must increasingly delegate political functions to large bureaucracies, which are inherently limited in their ability to perform satisfactorily. And the issues elected officials do retain are increasingly resistant to practical compromise. So the public becomes disenchanted with government and doubtful of the efficacy of its political system. Democracy, the authors seem to be saying, is, like other goods, not a matter of the more the better. Its goodness depends on judgment, restraint, and an understanding of its nature.

A professional career as crowded and productive as Jim Wilson's would have consumed the lives of most mortal men. It did not consume Jim: He led a robust, and indeed adventurous, life beyond the classroom and study. He was an exuberant husband, father, and grandfather for whom family life was the source of his highest pleasures and deepest satisfactions. He was an unabashed enthusiast for racy, powerful sports cars (at the height of the Harvard student protests of 1970, a demonstrator held a sign reading "James Q. Wilson Drives a Porsche"). He loved to drive very fast, preferably with his wife Roberta at his side to share the thrill, and although he was always courteous in traffic, he once remarked that other drivers seemed to have "the IQ of a turnip." He was also an expert western horseman, who would disappear every year for a few weeks of strenuous riding and ranching, including extended cattle drives. Which is to say: Jim was a thorough individualist, and a man who appreciated personal freedom not as an abstraction but palpably, as an essential source of fun and fulfillment.



Most impressively, he was a highly accomplished scuba diver. Jim and Roberta were both Divemasters—the highest rank in civilian diving, which qualified them to organize and lead diving expeditions. Which they did regularly, thereby exploring the most remote and exhilarating underwater sites on the planet on a professor's salary. On the reef as in the classroom, he was organized, expert, explicit in his instructions, and demanding in his expectations. But when free of the burdens of leadership, he was again the liberty-loving individualist. On diving vacations, he would listen intently as the local guide provided hard information on the local weather and underwater currents and terrain. But when the subject turned to rules and regulations designed for amateurs, he would cast a sly grin at his diving mates. He had internalized the norms of right diving conduct and thereby equipped himself for freedom. He would hit the water and be off on his own recognizance. In later years, he would carry sophisticated photography equipment, and return with videos (which he would skillfully edit himself) of enormous scowling wrasses, minuscule shy seahorses, and stunning tableaus of coral reefs and brilliant undulating ferns and grasses.

Jim's diving career showed once again that, for him, mastering and explaining a new field of knowledge was as natural and mandatory as breathing. In 1985, Roberta and Jim published the first edition of *Watching Fishes: Understanding Coral Reef Fish Behavior*. It has become a classic among diving cognoscenti; walk into a good dive shop in Sharm El Sheikh or the Solomon Islands today and you may still find it on the bookrack. *Watching Fishes* plumbs the mysteries of fish behavior just as his other books plumb the mysteries of human behavior. And in the same manner, with careful interpretations of the latest ichthyology research interlaced with insights from the authors' experiences. The book explains, to the extent it is known, why some fish are marauders and others territorial, why some are monogamous and others schooling, why some will compete and fight in the morning and cooperate and even clean each other in the afternoon. In the Wilsons' account, life on the coral reef looks a lot like life in Long Beach, except without the moral sense.

Jim Wilson's corpus of scholarship is now vouchsafed to the ages. But there is an aspect of his living career that should be noticed while the memory is still green. In an age where every form of authority was being eroded by the tide of democratic individualism, the man who documented that erosion became an authority himself. He was modern America's most authoritative intellectual figure. Walter Lippmann may have achieved a similar stature in his time, but that was when America still had a recognizable Establishment. There are, of course, many men and women today who are authorities within specific fields, and a few polymaths with interesting things to say about everything under the sun. What is singular about Wilson is that he was deeply conversant with essentially the entire range of public affairs, and marshaled his knowledge in every field with evident sound judgment and probity, with lucidity, and with democratic modesty and accessibility. He became a recognized authority on anything he chose to write about. Large numbers of his countrymen learned that, when they saw an article with his name on it, it would be worth their while to read it; they would be bound to learn something, and even if they disagreed with his conclusions, they would for the moment be in the company of a man who knew how to think seriously. Many of them were fortified in their convictions, changed their convictions, or simply took things on his say-so.

Although Jim's intellectual talents were surpassingly rare, his other virtues are widely accessible, and the uses he made of them should encourage emulation. But the most important lesson of his career is that it remains possible for a man of democratic temperament to become a self-made authority. ♦