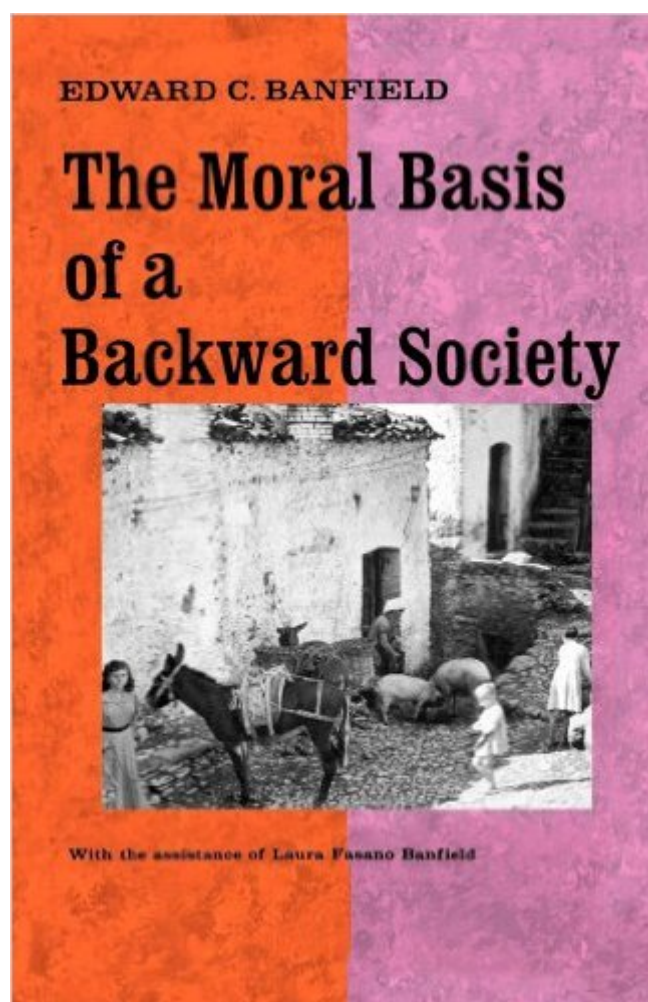


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Moral Basis Of A Backward Society



Synopsis

The Moral Basis of a Backward Society [THE MORAL BASIS OF A BACKWARD SOCIETY] By Banfield, Edward C. (Author) Feb-01-1967 Paperback

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Customer Reviews

Ed Banfield must have been about 42 when this book was published, yet it has a young man's astonishment and a young man's anger. Shrewd and observant as he was, he seems not to have realized what the world could be like until he settled down here in what was then (as, indeed, now) one of the poorest parts of Italy. It shocked him, as indeed it might have, for any number of reasons. But Banfield focused on just one: "the inability of the villagers to act together for their common good or, indeed, for any end transcending the immediate, material interest of the nuclear family." Until then, Banfield had been (he would surely hate this characterization) an American innocent-one thinks of the Ugly American in Graham Greene's novel, all good intentions and unintentional mischief. The difference is, of course, that Banfield did not remain an innocent: with his unflinching clarity of vision, and his shrewd capacity for synthesis, he used this inquiry to launch himself into one of the most important careers in political science in the 20th Century. In hindsight, one may be tempted to say that he could have known better. He does quote from "Christ Stopped at Eboli," by Carlo Levi. But in addition to Levi, others had seen what Banfield came to see: one thinks of Verga or Silone (one is tempted to add Sciascia, but most of his work came later). Indeed, closer to home, he might have learned from Norman Lewis' great "Naples '44." But this, as I concede, is hindsight. The fact is that you can't think of any other American scholar of his generation in his time who

approached this kind of problem in this kind of way.

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