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# The Sargent Governorship

## Leader and Legacy

Richard A. Hogarty

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*Following in the long line of succession of his predecessors, Francis W. Sargent served as the sixty-third governor of Massachusetts. A lifelong Republican, he was a man of character and sterling Yankee blue-blood lineage with the stature of a political independent. Grappling with a series of hot political issues and braving the passions and divisions spawned by the war in Vietnam, he was one of the ablest and most intriguing men ever to be governor. He worked hard at knowing his constituents and their concerns, but he did not always provide them with easy answers. Several new ideas were transformed into policy during his tenure as governor. Some of these adjustments required trial and error as well as the courage to face and learn from mistakes. This article reviews Sargent's political career in depth and evaluates his performance as chief executive.*

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History reminds us that nothing counterfeit has any staying power, an observation, incidentally, made by Cicero about 60 B.C. History teaches that character counts. Character above all.

— David McCullough, 1998

At the height of his power and popularity, Frank Sargent was the most visible and influential Republican in Massachusetts. A dynamic and visionary party leader, he served as governor during the turbulent and event-filled years from 1969 to 1975. A relatively liberal Republican in an overwhelmingly Democratic state, Sargent recognized the political world in which he lived, accepted it for what it was, and moved through it with a dash and verve rarely seen in American politics these days. He reached out for contact and, indeed, for confrontation. Adept at reading people and sorting out power relationships, he was astute at gauging public opinion and calculating electoral interests. Relying on his traditional base of Republican support, he crossed party lines and appealed to liberal Democrats and Independents, thereby expanding his statewide base. Sargent held the governorship twice, from 1969 to 1970, when he completed the remaining two years of the unexpired term of his predecessor, John Volpe, and again from 1971 to 1975, when he was elected to a full four-year term.

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Affectionately known by his nickname "Sarge," the Yankee reformer first ran for lieutenant governor in 1966 on the same ticket with Governor John Volpe, a Republican powerhouse who carried him into office. Plucked from virtual obscurity, Sargent adopted the catchy campaign slogan "Put Sarge in charge," which caught on with the public and became his rallying cry. Becoming lucky, he was thrust into the governor's office when President Richard Nixon tapped Volpe to become his secretary of transportation in Washington.

I undertake an analysis of Frank Sargent's style and strategy as a public person. What does Sargent's career tell us about the role of character and personality in executive politics and decision making? I also examine his leadership style and the impact he made on the office of governor. The last sections suggest reflectively the curiously mixed legacy Sargent left behind.

Evaluating the performance of a single governor is no simple undertaking. To begin with, the sources of power available to a governor are elusive and variable, and the interpretation of the data used to evaluate performance is in part subjective. Whether a governor will prevail in a dispute over policy, or even whether he will become significantly involved, is the result of a subtle combination of factors, not of a single determinant. A governor is first and foremost a politician whose career depends in large measure on the successful negotiation of bargains. When confronted with conflicting demands, he helps to maintain a viable society by the process of brokering mutual concessions. Political bargaining and compromise lie at the heart of the political process. The will to conquer and to make a difference also comes into play.

In terms of the historical development of the office, Frank Sargent undoubtedly benefited from the contributions of the sixty-two governors, an incredibly assorted lot, who had preceded him. Some were rogues and thieves; some the mere agents of business moguls and party bosses; some were amiable nonentities, adept at platitude and evasion, who served their terms and faded into deserved oblivion. Still others were men of ability and personal distinction who would compare favorably with any group of chiefs of state drawn from a comparable society that developed in three centuries from a collection of a few hundred hardy settlers to a metropolitan state of 6 million people.<sup>1</sup>

Both in style and strategy, Sargent represented a sharp break from his predecessors. Looking on the governorship as a unique position of responsibility, he saw himself as the chief problem solver. Politics for him was a game of risk. Like most elected officials, he kept his advocacy general, positioning himself to take credit for successes and to join the critics in the event of failure. Even this approach involved a modicum of risk that he would be blamed if things went wrong, but he realized it need not be fatal. His politics were hardly cautious. Where he differed most from his fellow governors was in choosing to lead rather than simply follow the dictates of the legislature. Dating back to colonial and revolutionary times, there had always been a strong tradition of legislative supremacy in Massachusetts. The Governor's Council, which had to approve almost everything a governor did, was purposely created as a political check on the executive.

For more than a century after the adoption of its 1780 Constitution, the legislature was for all practical purposes the state government. The governor's formal role in policymaking was very small, and his informal authority depended on his personality and his party strength. Although elected at large, the governor served in office

for a term of two years, subject to reelection. This short term limit seriously restricted his ability to get his programs enacted. A handful of governors attained considerable power during the first half of the twentieth century, but the legislature still remained dominant.<sup>2</sup> In marked contrast, Sargent was a prime example of a governor who both in crisis and in ordinary times broadened gubernatorial authority. When he cared intensely about a given issue, he reached out for the views of others and responded to ideas that would garner support from a coalition of interests. In so doing, he exerted the kind of policy leadership that had rarely been found in any of the previous administrations.

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### **An Altered Political and Cultural Landscape**

As a point of departure, it is important to acknowledge that Governor Sargent came to power in a tumultuous era, a time of great social upheaval in America. Numerous combustible elements were present, including high unemployment, rampant inflation, oil shortages, and recession. Assassinations, growing protests against the escalating war in Vietnam, civil rights demonstrations, urban riots, prison uprisings, racial violence over school busing, tenants rights, welfare rights, and countless other public discontents surfaced. Cities were beset with seemingly intractable problems. Slums, poverty, street crime, drug abuse, and gang wars were among the social ills that menaced the quality of urban life.

There was a general sense of alienation among minorities across the country. Many blacks and Latinos felt marginalized or left out of the political system. Politics for them was not the same as politics for other ethnic groups. The 1965 Voting Rights Act and the black power movement had produced some gains for black Americans, but the underlying racism continued. The spillover effects of the Vietnam War, which drained the nation's resources to fight the war against poverty at home, poisoned the domestic policy. Student protests and campus riots disrupted university life. Dissenting groups marched in the streets, took over public buildings, and shut down colleges in order to protest what they believed to be an unjust war in Southeast Asia and inequalities at home. These societal and economic forces combined to make the forging of gubernatorial policy a hard job.

A state constitutional amendment, adopted in 1964, had lengthened gubernatorial terms from two to four years, so Frank Sargent had twenty-two months to consolidate his position before facing the electorate. When he became governor in January 1969, at the age of fifty-four, he was viewed as a political lightweight. After all, he had been a Volpe loyalist or acolyte and was not considered a force in his own right. The transition was fairly smooth because he picked up where Volpe had left off, but he assumed office with few ideas in mind and without a clear public agenda. But as time went on, Sargent emerged as an independent chief executive who proved to be quite different from Volpe.

The tempo of gubernatorial initiative varies with the disposition of the incumbent, be he passive or active, positive or negative. Sargent was inclined to be active and positive, and the pace of the policy process increased accordingly. His intention from the outset was to make himself a highly visible governor, a symbol of energy and motion, accepting responsibility for a broad range of public issues, seeking to be innovative on the one hand and reactive on the other. Innovations were more likely to ensue when he had to deal with a crisis, for then he was more reactive than



engaged. He gravitated to the politics of innovation, although the circumstances were often less than auspicious.

For as long as he was in office, Sargent made the most of his political opportunity, but he had to deal with a legislature controlled by Democrats. This is where his ability to set aside partisanship and to work with partisans of a different persuasion came into play. By the time he finished his second term in 1975, he had achieved significant reforms in urban transportation, public housing, civil rights, environmental protection, mental health, gun control, special education, public welfare, juvenile and adult correctional systems, social services for children and the elderly, and consumer protection.

The Republicans had been the dominant party in Massachusetts ever since the end of the Civil War, but they were now declining in numerical strength. While they controlled the governorship from 1964 to 1974, the Democrats had controlled the legislature since 1958. The Republicans, no longer able to mount serious contests for the less visible statewide offices, were plunging ever deeper into minority party status. By the early 1970s, they were outnumbered in the legislature by almost a three to one margin. In fact, registered Democrats greatly outnumbered registered Republicans, and the number of Independents was on the rise. The Bay State was considered Kennedy territory.

Not surprisingly, the Massachusetts voters rejected President Richard Nixon when he ran for reelection in 1972, voting for U.S. Senator George McGovern of South Dakota, who accused Nixon of prolonging the unpopular war in Vietnam. A bastion of liberalism, Massachusetts could claim the distinction of being the only state to go for McGovern, a lesson not lost on its citizens. When the Watergate scandal broke in 1974, bumper stickers sent a subtle but sobering message to the rest of the nation: Don't Blame Me — I'm From Massachusetts.

Against the onslaughts of this volatile environment, Sargent grappled with the new realities of changing life in America and dealt in practical fashion with the pressing public issues of the day. Considering the hundreds of bills that he signed into law, three deserve special mention. One was the so-called anti-snob zoning law, which mandated low-income public housing in the suburbs, the first such legislation in the nation. The no-fault insurance bill eliminated unnecessary litigation and thereby reduced the high costs of automobile insurance, while the Shea bill challenged the legality of the Vietnam War. The last two pieces of legislation were sponsored by liberal Democrats Michael Dukakis and James Shea, respectively. The Shea bill, which put the state in prominent opposition to the war, was later declared unconstitutional by the courts. Sadly, Shea ended his life in suicide. Considered a rising star from his earliest days, Dukakis was an ambitious Brookline lawyer who had already set his sights on the governorship.

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### **Sargent — A New Kind of Republican**

Sargent was an amalgam of North Shore patrician and hardy Cape Cod fisherman. Having lived intermittently in both parts of the state, he was a purebred New England Yankee. His architectural education at MIT signaled a break from the traditional Harvard Law School career path. All of which meant that he not only had a technological capacity, but also used his technical knowledge for problem solving and identifying policy alternatives.

Sargent was neither your typical, dyed-in-the-wool, conservative Republican nor an ideologue, which gave him wide latitude in decision making.<sup>3</sup> Reared in the progressive Yankee reform tradition, he was in some ways a throwback to President Theodore Roosevelt. Like Roosevelt, Sargent, whose passion was the environment, was an ardent conservationist who sought to save the Massachusetts shoreline. He championed issues like clean air, clean water, and open space. He was an environmentalist before the term came into popular usage, and the celebration of Earth Day arrived before the term had entered the public consciousness. When most of Cape Cod was still relatively unspoiled, Sargent sounded the alarm about the impending danger to its pristine sand dunes and beaches, which were gradually being destroyed by the construction of new housing and large-scale commercial developments. To prevent such a calamity from happening, he spearheaded a crusade to establish what became the Cape Cod National Seashore. But more about that later.

If Sargent had a political hero, it was New York City's mayor, John Lindsay, who had successfully cast aside his traditional base of Republican support and built political alliances that depended heavily on liberal support. As political actors, Sargent and Lindsay were paired comfortably in ideology and outlook. Both were liberal Republicans who understood and exploited their position as popularly elected chief executives. Both exercised their executive powers forcefully and independently, acting as they thought conditions demanded and their conception of the office permitted. Eventually, Lindsay changed his party affiliation and became a Democrat; Sargent remained on the reservation but distanced himself from Richard Nixon as far as possible, a position that less than endeared him to right-wing conservatives, who increasingly dominated his party. Simply put, he possessed the intellect, mental toughness, and combativeness that were necessary to survive the nasty political wars at the State House. Secure in his convictions about how the world operated, he was willing to take risks and to push the boundaries of policy leadership. Nothing written about him disputes this interpretation.

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## **The Interplay of Personality and Politics**

The interplay of personality and politics had a lot to do with Sargent's success. Very much the pragmatist, he typically managed to intersperse his comments with good humor, which did a lot to soothe chaffed egos. While he delighted in taunting his political adversaries, he also offered them words of kindness and encouragement when life dealt its blows. Democrats, who watched him perform, concede that the wit and charm he used with a flourish did not come at the expense of his principles. As former Senate president Kevin Harrington recalls, "He was a physically and mentally tough guy. When he believed in something, nobody could argue him in or out of anything."<sup>4</sup> While Sarge frequently "went along to get along," he was no Puritan and had no difficulty compromising in order to cut deals. Nonetheless, he was determined to lean hard in directions that he believed to be right.

Sargent had a knack for sizing up a situation and turning it to his advantage. When adequately provoked or frustrated, he could get mad and swear like a trooper, but a self-deprecating wit reassured people that he did not take himself too seriously. He enjoyed the public limelight and the excitement of political life, but he was aware of its dark side. On one occasion he admitted, "When anyone asks me if

they should go into politics, I always say, 'Can your marriage stand it?' Politics is demanding, frustrating, and doesn't ever stop."<sup>5</sup>

More than one political rival referred to Sargent as the Marlboro man. Others referred to him as a tree hugger. In the words of John Powers, "He was the Yankee Republican poster boy (Norman Rockwell actually painted his portrait), spare and angular with sandy hair, a lantern jaw, and the 'S' whistling through his teeth, living out in horse country, growing his own vegetables, and spending not a nickel more than necessary."<sup>6</sup>

Given his looks and resonant voice, Sargent learned how to use these assets to his advantage, especially on television. He became adroit at using this medium to mobilize public opinion in support of his programs, even if at times it meant going over the head of the legislature to say what needed to be done. He fully exploited the public relations potential of the office. His messages to the legislature were consciously addressed to a wider public. In a 1974 interview Sargent commented, "As a governor, you're not a dictator. You have to be able to persuade the people. One of the problems is getting too far out in front of public opinion."<sup>7</sup> Whatever the inspiration, he had the ability to educate and the capacity to appear concerned with the problems of everyone while remaining calm and collected in the midst of a political whirlwind. In an era when the word *politician* was becoming increasingly associated with greed, corruption, and venality, he had a reputation for honesty, integrity, and independence.

In 1938, Sargent had married well — Jessie Fay, a Yankee of impeccable lineage. Like her husband, she enjoyed the outdoors and did more than her share of volunteer work in the community. Sargent was a Unitarian, his wife an Episcopalian. Jessie was a liberal Republican who campaigned for her husband and supported social issues dealing with day care centers, elderly affairs, mental retardation, low-income housing, and juvenile detention centers. She played a leading role in the Women's Political Caucus and co-chaired a state Commission on Citizen Participation. In her aptly titled book *The Governor's Wife*, Jessie defined her role.

As a Governor's wife, I am never in a position to raise a shrill voice. My efforts are often low-keyed and behind the scenes. I have to be aware of "bad press" and behaving in a manner not embarrassing to my husband or the administration . . . I strongly believe that a wife can be a tremendous campaign asset and the better she is known before the election the more help she can be. If she's been to a neighborhood before, made friends there, helped with local projects and shown concern for their local problems, the candidate's wife can be a major help for gaining endorsement of her husband's policies and candidacy.<sup>8</sup>

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### Glimpses of the Private Man

In his private life, Sargent was surrounded by close friends and a lifestyle that only those whose wealth was extraordinary could afford. Politically he may have championed the needs of the poor and disadvantaged, but socially he gravitated toward the rich and powerful. Both he and his wife were very private people, Jessie the more private of the two.<sup>9</sup> They had a private life as well as a public life. They were accessible yet inaccessible. That was part of their mystique.

In political parlance, Sargent had what is known as the common touch. Douglas



Foy, director of the Conservation Law Foundation, tells the story about Sarge's driving up to a toll booth on the Massachusetts Turnpike, quickly reading the toll collector's name tag, and striking up a friendly conversation with him. He, of course, had never met the man, but that was beside the point. While the toll collector represented a potential vote, the governor interacted with him both as a public and a private man.<sup>10</sup>

Another story is told about Sargent's befriending a young eleven-year-old boy while attending a World Series baseball game at Fenway Park in October 1967, the year of the "Impossible Dream," with the Boston Red Sox playing the Saint Louis Cardinals. The boy's father, who had purchased two separate tickets from a scalper, was unable to sit with his son, so he planted him in a box seat next to the lieutenant governor. Thirty-one years later, the youngster, by then a grown man, recounted what happened:

Sargent treated me as if I was the most important guy in the ballpark. It was as if we had gone to the game together. He asked me if I wanted a hot dog, popcorn, peanuts, whatever. I was keeping the box score, and as the game went on Sarge would lean over and say, "What'd he do his last time up?" or "How many has Lonborg struck out?" The box was swarming with visitors, of course, all looking to shake Sarge's hand or talk a little politics. I still remember that late in the game, Yaz got up and singled cleanly to right. Sarge stood up, applauded, and said, to no one in particular, "That's a damn good hit."<sup>11</sup>

Sargent described himself as being from the "fin, fur, and feather folks."<sup>12</sup> A hunting companion recalled an incident that took place in the predawn darkness. "We used to hunt together. I remember when he'd show up in the early morning, fire off his shotgun right beneath my bedroom window, and yell, "Get up, you lazy bum."<sup>13</sup> Subtlety was not his strong suit.

As a fisherman, Sargent became acquainted with all kinds of people in a world far removed from Beacon Hill. He told this shaggy dog tale about the owner of Thompson's Clam Bar and Wychmere Harbor Club on the Cape.

I got to know almost everybody on the waterfront. There was a guy who ran a place where you could sell your fish, and he used to drink like a son-of-a-bitch. One day he was stiff and he spotted me as he was going by our house. "Sarge, where the hell have you been?" he called out. "I've been in bed with sciatica," I told him. "Who's she?" he said. Well, Jessie was there and she died laughing.<sup>14</sup>

These episodes provide us with glimpses of the lesser-known Sargent who was seldom seen in public. His son Bill says that his father "loved doing things that kids loved to do. He was more like a grandfather to us."<sup>15</sup> It is essential to understand the personal element because it was such a vitally important aspect of his power.

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### **Sargent's Inner Circle and Decision-making Style**

While Sargent had a fairly clear sense of where he fit in the political spectrum, he had little patience with philosophic discussion and very limited curiosity about issues until they were actually thrust upon him. He craved being at the center of political action and enjoyed dealing with urgent and momentous choices. Sargent's single most important quality was his ability to make bold decisions. He liked to make decisions in a quasi-judicial mode, preferring to let things bubble up and choosing from



among alternatives developed and debated by his staff.<sup>16</sup>

As governor, Sargent operated on the principle of centralized management. He assembled a small staff and appointed the best people he could find to head the various executive departments and agencies. They were a mix of old and new faces largely picked by Sargent. The inner circle consisted of four men with whom he had worked closely prior to becoming governor: Donald Dwight, a mainstream moderate Republican; Albert Kramer, a liberal Democrat and former state representative who came from an urban working-class district in Chelsea; Robert Yasi, a former civil servant who understood the workings of the state bureaucracy; and Jack Flannery, a former newsman who worried about Sargent's political stakes and how he fared with the media. As the pressures of office descended upon them, these advisers struggled for the governor's mind, and they served him well. Dwight and Kramer remained the main policy advocates; Flannery served as a counterweight to Kramer. Steve Teichner and Tom Reardon, another newspaperman, joined this group somewhat later. Both Reardon and Flannery advanced the administration's position with editors and writers.

Alan Altshuler, an MIT academic who headed the governor's task force on highways and later became his secretary of transportation and construction, points out, "Sargent's personal inner circle had a high degree of continuity through his six years in office, and it remained dominant, even after the cabinet came into being, on matters that seemed to involve high personal stakes for the governor."<sup>17</sup> The governor sought to avoid becoming captured by the special interests and clientele groups that abound in public life. He trusted his staff to sort out the arguments put forward by outsiders and to craft his best alternatives. Sometimes his staff second-guessed his agency and department heads, which became a source of friction and internal squabbles.

Martha Weinberg's *Managing the State*, published in 1977, provides a detailed account of Sargent's relationship as governor with four specific state agencies. According to Weinberg, Sargent tried to exercise some degree of executive control over the Department of Public Works and the Department of Public Welfare, but he did not attempt to do so with the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency and the Department of Mental Health. These agencies are good examples of his willingness to intervene when he perceived there was a public or political crisis and to remain relatively unengaged in issues where these imperatives did not exist. Weinberg argues that Sargent remained both crisis-oriented and reactive throughout his tenure, responding to the flow of pressing issues and limiting himself to selecting from among options developed by others.<sup>18</sup>

Sargent embraced an active, involved role for government and accepted the reality of the welfare state. These were trends thoroughly consistent with the governor's temperament and philosophy. Most Republican politicians, by instinct and disposition, went the other way. Portrayed in the media as "a maverick governor of a maverick state," Sargent was a leader whose popular appeal transcended party lines.<sup>19</sup> The archetype of a new breed of crossover politician, he was shrewd enough to reach out to Democrats and Independents alike. Charles Kenney and Robert Turner, two veteran State House reporters who watched the Sargent battles at close range, described him in these terms, "Though a Republican, he was moderate to liberal on most issues, and he relished the give-and-take that were an essential part of relations with the Democratic legislature. Most important, the voters loved him."<sup>20</sup>

In 1970, Sargent the incumbent easily won his party's nomination for governor. He picked Donald Dwight as his running mate. In the general election, he ran against Democrat Kevin White, the mayor of Boston. Campaigning throughout the state, Sargent not only energized his Republican base, but he appealed to women, blacks, Hispanics, and the elderly. At one point, he lost his voice to laryngitis, so his wife and three grown children had to fill in for him as surrogates. When the ballots were finally counted, Sargent had defeated White by 259,354 votes, representing 56.7 percent of the total, to win his first full term as governor. Much to the chagrin of his opponent, Sargent even carried the city of Boston. After a grueling campaign, having won the corner office in his own right, he was no longer an accidental governor.

The morning after the election, Sargent and White had breakfast together at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Boston. As Sargent recalled, "When we were done, Kevin grabbed for the bill," and said, "I know goddamn well you're not going to pay for this."<sup>21</sup> Sargent enjoyed jousting with Irish Democrats, and as a Yankee Republican he made an easy target for them. The governor was adept at playing ethnic politics. He was especially fond of attending the annual Saint Patrick's Day brunch at Dorgan's restaurant in South Boston hosted by state senator William Bulger, a stand-up comedian in his own right. Both men enjoyed roasting each other in a good-natured way. This breakfast of corned beef and cabbage was a ritual of Irish-American political culture. While campaigning in certain neighborhoods, like Boston's North End, Sargent never failed to mention his Italian grandmother. He also boasted of his membership in the Braintree Lodge of the Sons of Italy, which further cemented his relations with the Italian population of the state.

Sargent governed more by the sheer force of his personality than by any grant of formal authority. In many ways, his personality matched his politics. He enjoyed marching in parades, slapping backs, pumping hands, and hanging out with Irish politicians who loved to needle him. Kevin White once commented that Sargent was the best he had ever seen in a parade, that he could make eye contact with every man, woman, and child along the parade route.<sup>22</sup> He was a relatively simple man, not complex or Machiavellian. David Nyhan, one of the most perceptive commentators on the Massachusetts political scene, drew this portrait of him:

What the political community prized most in Frank Sargent was the laughter. No politician of his rank had more fun in office, as often at his own expense as at another's. He was not a complicated man, of twisted psyche, inner turmoil, or desperate ambition. Frank was Frank: a beautiful man, a solid friend, an able leader, an honest public servant. And a million laughs. What's not to prize in such a splendid fellow?<sup>23</sup>

Having risen through the ranks of the fish-and-game and the public works bureaucracies, Sargent brought twenty-two years of experience in government to the task. The only thing he lacked was legislative experience, but this proved to be more of a political asset than a liability. He knew a lot about how government worked and who all the key players were. This knowledge and experience, coupled with his determination to lead rather than follow, made him a different kind of governor.

Looking back at the social and economic conditions that existed in the Bay State during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the political situation was clearly manipulable from the vantage point of someone like Sargent. He believed that there was no point in

holding power unless it could be used effectively. Furthermore, he recognized the social ferment and discontent that were brewing in Massachusetts and understood the reasons that caused people to press for social change. He used the bully pulpit whenever he thought it necessary, but he seldom preached to people. There is ample evidence to suggest that constituency and leader were attuned to each other's calculations.

Toward the end of his second term, however, Sargent would come to recognize that the magic had gone out of the enterprise. A booming economy had enabled him to create and expand programs without major tax increases until his final year. In October 1973, the economy began to falter with the disruption of oil supplies, which was compounded by rising unemployment and double-digit inflation, or what became known as "stagflation." Sargent's star was sinking fast and with it any grand notions of a third term. In his bid for reelection in 1974, he faced a formidable Democratic opponent in Michael Dukakis, who appealed to the same constituencies that Sargent had cultivated.

But as the campaign wore on, Sargent seemed to stumble and became preoccupied with falling public opinion polls and day-to-day crises. Not only had he drifted away from his conservative Republican base, he had also antagonized it. A big flap was made about his borrowing \$40,000 from his wife to finance his campaign, violating the provisions of a recently passed campaign-finance law. In typical fashion, Sargent dismissed this disclosure with wry humor. He told the Everett Rotary Club that he was sorry he did not arrive in time for lunch. "I couldn't come up with the price of the ticket," he said solemnly. "Jessie wouldn't lend me the dough."<sup>24</sup>

It turned out to be a hard-fought and bitterly contested campaign. On Election Day, Dukakis garnered 992,284 votes, 53.5 percent of the total, as compared with Sargent's 784,353. Sargent was defeated by factors beyond his control. The Republicans had held the governorship since 1964 and it was time for a change. Sargent shrugged off his defeat by blaming it on "the price of hamburg." As he put it, "I didn't blow my stack at all. I could kind of see it coming."<sup>25</sup> Whether the economy was the substantial cause of his defeat no one can say for certain, but it was surely among the major causes. Racial violence over court-ordered school busing had erupted in Boston in September 1974, just two months prior to the election. Sargent supported the state's Racial Imbalance Act of 1965, and as the chief law enforcement officer, he sent in National Guard troops to quell the civil disturbance.<sup>26</sup> The presence of state troops inflamed passions, especially in South Boston, which became a hotbed of antibusing. Through the ever present lens of network television, the nation watched the ugly upheaval unleashed by the desegregation orders of federal judge Arthur Garrity. To top it off, Watergate, the Nixon pardon, oil shock, and the faltering economy all made 1974 a disastrous year for the Republican Party nationally. Sargent ran about as far ahead of the rest of the Republican ticket as he had in winning a comfortable victory four years earlier, but the outcome this time was a crushing defeat.

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### **The Political Apprenticeship**

Frank Sargent was born on July 29, 1915, in the small rural town of Hamilton, Massachusetts, where the social elite on the North Shore played polo and other equestrian sports. A patrician by birth and disposition, he could lay claim to a sterling Yankee background.



Reared a child of privilege, he was a half cousin to the famous American painter John Singer Sargent. These family credentials gave him impeccable native-born, blue-blood status. Not much is known about his early childhood except that his father died when Frank was only three years old. His maternal grandfather, George Lee, who was a former New England amateur boxing and sculling champion, instilled in him the love of the outdoors. Lee also contributed to the future political fortunes of his grandson by marrying an Italian woman, Eva Ballarini.

Sargent and his brother grew up in a family without a father or one they would never come to know. The family had an Irish nurse who helped to raise the two boys. This set of circumstances may explain psychologically why the future governor needed to make friends and later why he got along so well with Irish politicians. His mother eventually married Arthur Adams. The Adams family, direct descendants of President John Quincy Adams, were quite conservative while the Sargents were very liberal. There were tensions between the two families. Young Frank Sargent was sent to the exclusive Noble and Greenough School in Dedham, where he developed his social graces and prepared for college. There he wanted everybody to be his friend, including the teachers and janitors.<sup>27</sup> In 1935, he passed up Harvard, a Brahmin preserve, to study architecture at MIT.

After graduating from MIT in 1939, Sargent joined the prestigious Boston architectural firm of Coolidge, Shepley, Bulfinch and Abbott, apprenticing as a draftsman. For a brief period, he worked as a carpenter to learn the building trades firsthand. He and a MIT classmate opened a small architect's office. Shortly after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, Sargent enlisted in the U.S. Army. An accomplished skier, he volunteered as a ski trooper and was assigned to the famed 10th Mountain Division, which trained hard in Colorado for alpine combat. Rising in the ranks from private to captain, he fought in Italy, where he was wounded twice and earned the Purple Heart and Bronze Star. His combat record would later serve him in good stead with veterans groups.

On returning from the war, Sargent devoted himself to his career and to raising a family. The war had changed his outlook on life. Abandoning architecture, he settled in Orleans on Cape Cod to earn a living doing what he loved most, namely, hunting and fishing. In the fall he worked as a duck guide, in the winter he fished commercially for lobster and halibut, and in the spring and summer he ran a charter boat out of Rock Harbor. He also operated a successful sporting goods business and opened the Goose Hummock Shop on Route 6A. One of the shop's early best-sellers was a goose decoy that Sargent had fashioned from cork insulation board and a fishnet float.

Before long, Sargent grew bored with running his business. His advocacy of fishermen would take him into politics. In Rock Harbor he had heard stories about the illegal netting of striped bass. He investigated the matter and started a crusade to stop this abuse. Sargent invited Republican governor Robert Bradford to board his boat and see for himself. He showed Bradford that the current laws were not working properly. Bradford then asked him to become the state's director of marine fisheries in 1947. Sargent agreed to take the job for the winter but remained in the post for almost ten years.

Commercial fishermen were upset by the appointment of a man whom they considered an amateur and dilettante, but Sargent surprised them by shipping out with the Boston trawler fleet and working as one of the crew on the Grand Banks. He also

devoted considerable time speaking to rod-and-gun clubs, garden clubs, Audubon groups, and other conservationists about the dangers of pollution. In Sargent's own words, "I used to be kind of a voice in the wilderness, railing against pollution of our tidal waters and marshes. Some hunters and fishermen listened, but others were more interested in how many trout you were going to stock in Round Pond, even though a developer might pollute the pond."<sup>28</sup> (Interestingly, this occurred before Rachel Carlson had written *Silent Spring*, which was published in 1962.)

From 1959 to 1962, Sargent went to Washington to serve as executive director of a temporary federal commission on recreational open-space resources. In this capacity, he formed a unique partnership to save the Cape Cod shoreline by creating a new park. It was an auspicious time for such a venture. Alarmed by urban sprawl and the proliferation of housing subdivisions that threatened to change forever the pristine shoreline, Sargent took a lead position in promoting this audacious project. The idea was anathema to many local real estate agents and businessmen who objected on the grounds that they would be hurt financially. Others worried that it would bring a rush of tourists, spoiling the habitat and overrunning their quiet communities. Enlisting the support of U.S. senators John F. Kennedy and Leverett Saltonstall, along with philanthropist Paul Mellon, Sargent overcame fierce, shortsighted local opposition by taking a novel approach to the problem of land protection. Previous national parks had been created by federal land purchases and private funding. To these techniques, the group added a zoning agreement among the six affected localities to set aside the land and limit development. To minimize political opposition, private landowners were allowed to retain ownership of their land for a period of ninety-nine years, but they had to agree not to develop it. On August 7, 1961, President Kennedy signed the law creating the Cape Cod National Seashore, which set aside 44,600 acres of land, including forty miles of shoreline on the Great Beach and ten miles flanking Cape Cod Bay.

On his return to Massachusetts in 1962, Sargent ran unsuccessfully for state senator in Barnstable County. He lost in a Republican primary, mainly for lack of time and poor organization, but he learned from his mistakes. In 1963 he accepted an appointment from Democratic governor Endicott Peabody to serve as an associate commissioner of the Department of Public Works. The DPW had just been reorganized following a major scandal, so this was a fairly visible reform appointment. While undertaking the assignment, he met Al Kramer, who helped him clean up the mess in the scandal-ridden department.

When Republican John Volpe became governor again in 1965, he named Sargent chair of the commission, making him the head of the department. The conservationist had now become a public road builder. In his DPW role, Sargent was responsible for planning and design work on interstate expressway projects, and he led a successful effort to secure legislation eliminating local authority to veto state highway projects. In 1966 Volpe picked Sargent as his running mate, and the rest, as they say, is history.

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### A Maverick Party Leader

Governor Francis Sargent was the chief spokesman for the liberal wing of the state Republican Party. By virtue of his office, he was the leader of his party, half be-

holden to it, sometimes able to bend it to his own vision. Party organization and party discipline were never as strong as some observers remember, but they were influential factors in nominating and electing a governor. Still, the links were not strong. Sargent's liberal views frequently clashed with those of right-wing conservative Republicans. As the years went on, the chasm between the two sides became wide and deep, and they were clearly estranged. A more serious and potentially more damaging chasm appeared among members of the Republican State Committee. Martha Weinberg observed regarding Sargent,

The Republican state committee regarded him with suspicion because of his liberal policies, his appointment of many Democrats to positions in his administration, his refusal to back unilaterally all party candidates, and his lukewarm response to the candidacy of Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew. Sargent, in turn, did not rely heavily on the state Republican party organization but instead built "Governor Sargent Committees" in each county in the state. Although several times he attempted to purge the Republican State Committee of his opponents, he relied on his own organization to attract the Independents and Democrats whom he needed to survive in Massachusetts, where a large majority of registered voters are Democrats and Independents.<sup>29</sup>

Sargent possessed an inner ballast that was absolutely unshakable. He got along better with Democratic legislative leaders than with some members of his own party. This group included House speaker David Bartley and two consecutive Senate presidents, Maurice Donahue and Kevin Harrington. Their power relationships reflected a partial truce in the cultural wars that had long pitted the Irish against the Yankees.

For the moment, however, Sargent had little time for such lofty considerations. At the beginning, their relations were untested. To break the ice, the governor put on his desk a sign that read Don't Ask Me, I Didn't Go to Harvard, and he set about wooing enough Democratic lawmakers to allow him to function. By his own admission, "I pissed off some Republicans, but there was no other way to get anything done."<sup>30</sup> His wooing of Democrats made for prudent politics because it enabled him to get most of his legislative program enacted. He essentially led a coalition government.

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### **Halting the Construction of Boston Expressways**

Immediately on taking office in January 1969, Sargent was confronted by neighborhood and environmental activists seeking to stop five interstate expressway projects scheduled for completion in the Boston metropolitan region. These included the Inner Belt, I-95, I-93, the Southwest Expressway, and the Route 2 extension. The extension of Interstate 95 would have cut through Roxbury, the Back Bay, Cambridge, Somerville, and Charlestown and would have required the demolition of about 3,800 homes. It would have also damaged a natural wildlife and conservation area, Fowl Meadow in the Canton-Milton woods. Many homes of low-income families had already been taken by eminent domain and bulldozed for clearance.<sup>31</sup> With some buildings partially demolished and others completely reduced to rubble, the Southwest Corridor looked like a bombed-out World War II German city.

Since the community organizers had mobilized a large number of poor minorities who marched on the State House, their demands could hardly be ignored. The protest



movement was quite successful, given the redistributive objectives that the protestors were pursuing. Day by day, week by week, media-savvy community groups dominated the public discussion, keeping the issues in their favored frame and putting the Department of Public Works on the defensive.

Cross-pressured, Sargent was cautious in his initial response. After four months, however, he announced that he would appoint a special task force to review pending highway plans for the Boston region. He did not do so until September 1969. To chair the task force, he named Alan Altshuler, a professor of political science at MIT, who had written on the politics of transportation and planning. The task force included a mix of business leaders, academics, and independent professionals but no one who had taken a public position on the projects in dispute.

In January 1970, Altshuler informed the governor that the task force would recommend a moratorium on the controversial expressways and the development of a new, environmentally sensitive plan for a major highway and mass transit facilities in the Boston area. At the time, no American governor had ever halted work on an interstate expressway. This was truly the meeting of the moment, the man, and the place.

The task force's recommendations touched off an intense, month-long debate that the governor structured with his inner circle. Donald Dwight opposed the moratorium; Al Kramer favored it. Altshuler, who took a middle-ground position, wanted to kill some, but not all, of the proposed expressways and build the remainder at reduced scale. As Altshuler recalled, "Sargent confided privately that he thought I was very likely right technically, but he did not see who would support my middle-ground position. The pro-highway and anti-highway forces were so polarized that he felt compelled to choose one or the other in clear-cut fashion."<sup>32</sup>

Sargent benefited from the highly politicized context in which policy was being formulated. Facing the electorate that year, he was searching for issues, allies, and liberal credentials for the forthcoming election in which he would emerge the winner. Ironically, Sargent, who had previously been pro-highway, came down squarely on the side of the environmentalists and neighborhood groups. His intuition for the bold stroke was at hand. The solution, he decided, was to call a halt to construction.

On February 11, 1970, Sargent appeared on television to announce his decision publicly. The governor endorsed the task force's recommendations and declared a moratorium on the five expressway projects. His message was simple and compelling. Taking note of his role as former DPW commissioner, he told his viewing audience, "Nearly everyone was sure highways were the only answer to transportation problems for years to come. But we were wrong."<sup>33</sup> In making such a dramatic turn-about, Sargent took a giant step in defining his public image, emphasizing that he cared about the soft side of politics. His critics thought they could see him manipulating the issue for votes.

But Sargent had no money to carry out the recommended planning study, which was necessary if he was to replace the discarded plan with a new one. The task force had estimated a need for \$3.5 million, which the Democratic, pro-highway legislature was not about to provide. The Federal Highway Administration was certain to be hostile. Frank Turner, the federal highway administrator, soon forecast publicly that Boston would strangle on its traffic unless the proposed expressways were built.

Sargent's only hope was that John Volpe might be persuaded to overrule his subordinates, but such persuasion would be most difficult. Volpe as governor had been

fully supportive of the projects to be halted. Sargent had put off informing Volpe of his decision until an hour before he went on television, because he did not want to offer him an opening to argue the issue.

A few days later, Sargent, along with Altshuler and Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority chairman Robert Wood, went to Washington to meet with Volpe in the vice president's office. There was every indication that this meeting would be sensitive. Volpe marched in with his entourage and immediately started lecturing Sargent. He told him that he was listening to the wrong people, then pointed directly at Alan Altshuler. Fortunately, Volpe had his own in-house liberal assistant, Joseph Bosco, whose views were shifting in this peak year of environmentalism. As things turned out, the Massachusetts delegation got the funding they needed.

Sargent won the election and moved ahead with the Boston Transportation Planning Review in 1971. Although it ultimately resulted in the cancellation of every major highway project proposed for the Boston metropolitan area, the BTPR process was not intended to achieve such a result. Rather, it was an effort to assess the relative costs and benefits of a variety of strategies for addressing the region's transportation needs.<sup>34</sup> It soon became clear that some projects, including the Inner Belt and the Route 2 extension, could not be built without enormous disruption. Consequently, in December 1971, Sargent dropped both roads from further consideration.<sup>35</sup>

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### **Calming an Antiwar Protest**

As the Vietnam War and resistance to it escalated, it became increasingly difficult to keep the peace at home. Antiwar demonstrations and protests were common occurrences. When the young rebelled against the accustomed norms, the reaction was often severe. Older generations of Americans, especially those who had served in World War II and Korea, were outraged by what they perceived as the rejections of patriotism. Most governors in America responded to these crises by sending antiriot squads into the streets, often using tear gas and billy clubs. With a Republican president in the White House, Sargent was the first Republican governor to come out against the war. His support of the Shea bill was a litmus test.<sup>36</sup> Yet, in response to an urgent request from Harvard president Nathan Pusey, the governor ordered state police to break up the occupation of University Hall. Several students were arrested and sent to jail.

In 1970, when the Ohio National Guard killed students at Kent State University, the pot was boiling over on campuses across the country. In Boston, thousands of angry students descended upon the State House and held an antiwar rally. One of their speakers demanded that the American flag be lowered to half mast as a tribute to those slain at Kent State. Shouts of "lower the flag" rippled through the surging crowd and soon reached a crescendo. Two frightened capitol policemen stood guard at the flagpole.

This scene set the stage for what followed. Looking out the window of his corner office, Sargent asked his staff what would happen to the capitol police if the flag was not lowered.<sup>37</sup> He realized that they would probably be injured. Since the students were only asking for respect, he ordered Donald Dwight to lower the flag. This statesmanlike gesture averted a near riot and saved the policemen from possible harm. The political task

was one of truly keeping the peace. No one can measure the results of the simplest act performed under such circumstances, but it had a calming effect. The crowd gradually dispersed. As Al Kramer later recalled, "Sargent responded not to the anger, but to the idealism and hope of those times."<sup>38</sup>

Many observers considered the flag incident more as a political statement and publicity stunt than a genuine peace offering. The Democratic hawks in the legislature urged Senate president Maurice Donahue to blast Sargent publicly for having caved in to the student demands. Donahue, who was seeking the Democratic nomination for governor, was fully aware of Sargent's distinguished military combat record in World War II and refused to do so.

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### **Creating a New Cabinet System**

Sargent's administrative style evolved considerably between his first and his second term. During the first, confronted by more than 350 state agencies, Sargent and his staff were able to do little more than paper over crises, set a few initiatives in motion, and nurture Sargent's personal image with the media and electorate. In the first year of Sargent's second term, however, a state cabinet system was created.<sup>39</sup> The legislature had adopted the cabinet system in 1969, deferring its effective date to 1971 on the assumption that a Democrat would win the governorship in 1970. Maurice Donahue was not about to place ten patronage plums at Sargent's disposal. After Sargent prevailed in 1970, the legislature balked for several months at funding the cabinet offices, but finally relented after Sargent mounted an effective media campaign.

The reorganization plan established ten new "super" executive agencies. The cabinet secretaries served at the pleasure of the governor, and their staffs were exempt from civil service. Moreover, their appointments did not require legislative confirmation. They had little statutory authority, but the governor had broad discretion to delegate agency oversight authority to the secretaries. Sargent, using this authority to the fullest, also specified that in those matters which the law required him to act personally, he wanted to be advised by the secretaries rather than directly by their agencies.

Sargent appointed well-qualified people to the top positions in his administration, among them Peter Goldmark, secretary of human services, Charles H. Foster, secretary of environmental affairs, Steven Minter, commissioner of public welfare, Thomas Atkins, commissioner of housing, David Liederman, director of the office of children, and Jack Leff, secretary of elder affairs, to mention only a few. Some of these appointees were Democrats, which did not sit well with hard-line Republicans.

Steven Minter was recruited from Ohio, where he had been director of the welfare department of Cuyahoga County. Sargent wanted him to straighten out the mess that resulted when the state took over the welfare system from the localities in July 1968. The 351 Massachusetts cities and towns were no longer responsible for welfare, but the central office was in shambles. There was no standardized payment system for recipients. Each local office functioned according to the standards of its local director so that there were large discrepancies in records. Saddling the department with the additional task of administering the new Medicaid program simply added to the disarray.

Politicians, depending on their ideological persuasion, wanted to know why recipients were not being paid promptly, why the welfare rolls were increasing, and why ven-



dors of medical services were not being reimbursed. The National Welfare Rights Organization staged several demonstrations to demand increased benefits. Seen against this background, Minter tried his best to maintain the current level of support and services. He restructured welfare in Massachusetts, and the workings of the system in a managerial sense improved. Martha Weinberg concludes:

On most management issues in welfare, the governor was unable to dictate the behavior of the agency or to ensure that it act as he wanted it to act. For the governor and his staff, managing welfare seldom offered the possibility of clear rewards. There was little room for dramatic policy initiation or for intervention that would capture the public imagination. Instead, Sargent faced constraints on his ability to control the department accompanied by constant potential for crisis. This was positive incentive for him to ignore the department whenever possible.<sup>40</sup>

On another front, Sargent appointed political scientist Robert Wood as chairman of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), which seemed to be a natural choice. Wood had just returned from Washington, where he had served first as undersecretary and then secretary of housing and urban development in the Lyndon Johnson administration. In *Suburbia*, Wood wrote that "transportation is the central reality of the metropolitan community."<sup>41</sup> After his tenure at HUD, he received a chance to put his ideas into action locally. On assuming his new post, Wood inquired about the MBTA's equal opportunity office and, to his dismay, found that no such office existed, a situation he brought to Sargent's attention and took steps to remedy. The agency had a history of discriminating against minorities. Wood also oversaw the extension of both the Orange Line and the Red Line. These extensions dramatically transformed communities like Somerville and Quincy. The Red Line extension, which brought Davis Square into being, enabled Tufts University to prosper and allowed graduate students at Harvard and elsewhere to reside in Somerville. The same situation developed in Quincy.<sup>42</sup>

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### The Deinstitutionalization of Mental Patients

Frank Sargent named Peter Goldmark, a twenty-nine-year-old whiz kid, as his secretary of human services. Goldmark had previously served in John Lindsay's New York City administration. One of his policy objectives, shared by Sargent, was to move as many people as possible out of the large human service institutions and into smaller community facilities. Goldmark's strategy relied on forcing bureaucratic agencies to act by applying pressure from constituency groups at the grassroots level.

Whatever its merits, Goldmark's strategy of citizen participation was staunchly resisted by mental health commissioner Milton Greenblatt, who did not favor the concept of deinstitutionalization. This reform, fueled by federal money, was designed to place mental patients in community residences and halfway houses as an alternative to warehousing them in large custodial institutions. Under fire from a citizens' task force on children out of school, Greenblatt stonewalled their efforts to monitor the implementation of Chapter 750, which called for the delivery of mental health and educational services to emotionally disturbed youngsters who were at risk. The commissioner also came under attack from a legislative commission that had investigated the

deaths of four mentally retarded clients at Belchertown. Although an internal probe conducted by the Department of Mental Health absolved Greenblatt of any negligence in the matter, the Lolos commission found him partially responsible and called for his resignation. These events led to his forced departure in December 1972.

After a six-month nationwide search, Sargent replaced Greenblatt with William Goldman, a San Francisco psychiatrist. Goldman set a new direction for the department by allowing the citizen area boards to participate in the budgetary process and by refusing to curry favor with the medical establishment, which was viewed as a sacred cow. He viewed the doctors as stubborn resisters of change and impediments to new policies. Furthermore, he infuriated them by refusing to fund psychiatric residencies at many of the affiliated university hospitals and clinics. Goldman was the original architect of closing the state mental hospitals. Over the years these institutions had suffered from benign neglect and the quality of treatment of patients had steadily deteriorated. Under Goldman's direction, three mental hospitals (Grafton, Gardner, and Foxborough) were closed within a span of three years.<sup>43</sup>

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### **Closing Juvenile Jails**

In October 1969, Sargent appointed Jerome Miller commissioner of youth services. Born in South Dakota in 1932, Miller grew up in Minnesota and attended college in the Midwest. After graduation, he entered a Catholic seminary and spent five years studying for the priesthood. He subsequently left the seminary, joined the U.S. Air Force, and obtained a doctorate in social work. While stationed in England as a psychiatric social worker, he had developed a community treatment program for troubled children of air force personnel.<sup>44</sup>

At the time of his Massachusetts appointment, Miller discovered that nearly one thousand youngsters were incarcerated in juvenile jails or what were commonly known as county training schools. Described in the press as "barbaric relics from an embarrassing past," these institutions were also known for their harsh and inhumane treatment of children. Grim stories of mental cruelties and physical and sexual abuse abounded. Not only that, the Department of Youth Services (DYS) was plagued by controversy and scandal. Most of the staff owed their jobs to political patronage. After two years of attempting to reform DYS from within, Miller concluded that "slow change was no change" and that "we could keep it going as long as we went at it full blast and really kept our heads together around a certain altruism, but no one should have to depend on someone else's altruism. It's too risky."

Miller, dismayed by what he learned, decided to go for broke. He began closing the juvenile detention centers during the late fall of 1971. At the outset, he did not fully apprise the governor of his intentions, but word soon leaked out as the results became known. By mid-January 1972 he had closed all but one of the institutions, and the remaining one, Lancaster, housed a substantially reduced population, about half of whom were participating in a privately run program. The young people were either paroled home, placed in foster homes, or placed in community-based programs or group homes. The new program, which was federally funded, made Massachusetts the first state to eliminate juvenile prisons and attracted the attention of penologists across the nation. DYS spent the remainder of 1972 attempting to cope with the consequences of the closings, to consolidate the new directions for treat-

ment of delinquency, and to ward off mounting opposition from the legislature.

DYS was subjected to intensive legislative investigation and public hearings. This powerful oversight was led by Westfield Democrat Robert McGinn, a former police officer, who engaged in a bitter feud with Miller. After a shouting match at the State House, McGinn yelled to reporters, "I'll bury Miller. He's a nut. He's insane. He belongs in an insane asylum."<sup>45</sup> Despite these attacks, Miller had strong allies in House speaker David Bartley and state representative John McGlynn of Medford. Better yet, he had the support of Jessie Sargent, who had a keen interest in the issue and was a strong public advocate for closing juvenile detention centers. He also had the support of the *Boston Globe*. Miller would never have been able to accomplish what he did without the help of these allies.

Miller resigned as commissioner of DYS in January 1973 to take a similar position in Ohio. His departure met with reactions as varied as those he had aroused throughout his stormy thirty-nine months in office. The governor accepted his resignation with public regret; the *Boston Globe* offered effusive praise; the speaker of the House lamented the administrative chaos he had left behind; and the legislature began yet another investigation.

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### **The Park Plaza Urban Renewal Project**

In early 1971, the Boston Redevelopment Authority proposed the construction of a \$266 million urban renewal project in downtown Boston. The Park Plaza project, adjacent to the Boston Public Garden, contained some of the most valuable real estate in the city.<sup>46</sup> This economic development project, which was viewed by the news media as Mayor Kevin White's baby, was to be privately financed without any federal aid. One of the two private developers involved in the project was real estate tycoon Mortimer Zuckerman, a close friend of the mayor.

Under state law, local urban renewal projects required the approval of the Department of Community Affairs (DCA). On May 4, 1972, Sargent appointed Miles Mahoney its commissioner. Mahoney had previously served as the director of the Philadelphia Housing Authority. A month later, on June 9, the new commissioner turned down the Park Plaza project on the grounds that the site, which included portions of the tawdry Combat Zone, did not meet the "blight" criterion of the law. Mahoney's finding sparked a heated controversy. His opponents derisively commented that the blight was not the right blight.

Then came the public outcry. Mayor White vigorously objected and filed home rule legislation designed to circumvent the need for state approval. At the time, Sargent was in the process of killing the major highways around Boston. In a period of inflation and high unemployment, he could ill afford to kill all economic development projects. The administration desperately needed a political trophy. Disagreements and disappointments were initially glossed over. Al Kramer tried his best to resolve the dispute, but to no avail. Negotiations were at a standstill.

A revised proposal was submitted to Mahoney, who once again rejected it. He remained resolute in his opposition and refused to back down, but there were repercussions. Both the business community and organized labor got into the act. Some 10,000 angry construction workers marched on the State House to voice their protests. The battle, which took on a momentum of its own and grew in intensity, reflected the stresses



and strains in the administration.

On November 29, 1972, Sargent decided to overrule his DCA commissioner and to push ahead with the project. Soon afterward the governor fired Mahoney for being too parochial and rigid and appointed Louis Crampton to replace him. A special irony lay in the fact that the Park Plaza project was never built. Instead, the state constructed a huge transportation building on the site.

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### **Hiring and Firing a Corrections Commissioner**

Prison reform aroused considerable public attention and controversy in Massachusetts in December 1971. The prison uprising in Attica, New York, and its brutal suppression by excessive police force had already shocked the nation. It was a rude awakening that sparked a similar prison uprising at Walpole. As a consequence of this disturbance, Massachusetts corrections commissioner John Fitzpatrick resigned. The Sargent administration conducted an extensive search for a new commissioner dedicated to prison reform and community-based correctional programs. The governor's staff was seeking someone who could bridge the gap between inmates and the community at large. The selection committee chose three finalists from a list of twenty names. Sargent interviewed each of them and picked John O. Boone.<sup>47</sup>

A career civil servant, Boone was a forty-nine-year-old black man from Atlanta who had been the warden of the federal penitentiary at Lorton, Virginia. Although he worked at the considerable disadvantage of being from the South, his race proved even more of an impediment in a department that was almost entirely white. Sargent and Goldmark did not set out looking for a black commissioner, but when they found a likely black candidate, they believed he might be better able to relate to inmates, a large percentage of whom were black. Long persuaded that the Department of Corrections (DOC) was an ossified and intransigent bureaucracy, they wanted someone who would shake things up. The governor told Boone that he would have "two good years" to implement his programs. "I knew very well, when I appointed him, there was going to be hell to pay," Sargent said, "and there sure was."<sup>48</sup>

The prison world was complex and brutal. Murders, robberies, rapes, and other forms of brutality occurred between inmates, toward staff, and staff to inmates. On taking office, Boone promptly removed the superintendents at Walpole and Norfolk and replaced them with wardens from outside the state. DOC personnel were very unhappy that he had recruited outside the system. Obviously, Boone wanted to improve conditions within the prisons and to reduce the inmate population, but he seriously underestimated the countervailing power of the guards and their labor union.

To the outrage of prison guards, Boone allowed the inmates the right to organize and to participate in some aspects of prison management. As a result of these actions, the guards believed they were in grave physical danger. They were infuriated by what they perceived as a loss of discipline and control of the prisoners. From their perspective, they had been stripped of their authority and relegated to opening and closing the cell gates.

The appointment of Boone ignited a firestorm of protest, stirring emotions on all sides. As the leading figure of prison reform, Boone was out in front on the issue and

hence the lightning rod for criticism. The *Boston Herald* launched a concerted campaign to discredit him. Articles detailing the chaos and disorder that prevailed in the prisons appeared each week. These stories were advanced so vigorously that the governor's press secretary, Tom Reardon, openly questioned their fairness and accuracy.

The political fallout from the *Boston Herald* stories had the immediate effect of putting Boone on notice that his job was in jeopardy. It also generated a barrage of criticism from legislators who were being pressured by the guards. Alarmed by the disorder, Senate president Kevin Harrington felt that the situation had become dangerously out of hand. Soon editorials calling for firing Boone were being published.

Under intense fire, Boone had to manage a different and more demanding organizational change. While he had his detractors, he also had his defenders. A coalition of interested citizens, including prison reform advocates, leaders in the black community, ex-offender groups, and several liberal legislators, staunchly defended him. Democratic state senator Jack Backman of Brookline was among his most ardent supporters. As far as these people were concerned, Boone was doing what needed to be done. The governor showed him steadfast loyalty and declared as much in the press.

Tensions at Walpole remained high and violence among the inmates erupted again. On March 17, 1972, Walpole exploded into another major riot that resulted in considerable damage. Responding to what became known as the Saint Patrick's Day riot, Boone announced a new training program for the guards and asserted that it would take \$1.3 million dollars to turn the corrections system around. Shortly after this outburst, a riot occurred at the women's prison in Framingham. Boone dismissed its new superintendent, only to reinstate her when the guards threatened a walkout. Protected by civil service rules, she could not be fired without adequate cause.

Meanwhile, Sargent filed his Omnibus Correctional Reform bill on February 9, 1972, as one of his "most important pieces of legislation" for that session. Its central provisions were logical and linked: halfway houses, work and education release, furloughs, prison industries, county jail standards, ex-offenders eligible for correction jobs, and so on. Sargent contributed to the reform effort by placing the prestige of his office behind it and utilizing his talents in public relations to overcome political obstacles. The omnibus bill was passed in July 1972, owing in large measure to the cooperation of speaker David Bartley, who quietly slipped the bill through the House without much debate.

A series of dreadful events combined to dramatize the dangerous situation in the prisons and to seal the commissioner's fate. These included the killing of two prison guards by a Norfolk inmate; another inmate killed himself when his homemade bomb accidentally exploded; the inmates at Concord doused the prison chaplain with gasoline, but state police came to the rescue before they could immolate him; and a convicted murderer killed again while on furlough. The guards, traumatized by these horrific events, especially the murders of their fellow guards, staged a one-day sickout in protest. Sargent attended the funerals where he received a hostile reception. The guards publicly branded him a murderer. Unaccustomed to such abusive treatment, he was deeply shaken. He recalled:

But to go to a funeral and as far as you can see, a line on either side of the church, of corrections officers in uniform from around our state and from surrounding states, from Rhode Island and elsewhere. And to walk into the church and you get the rumble of a

boo. And I tried to shake hands with a couple and I got "Go on, f—k you!," and all that kind of stuff, outside the church. It was a little unnerving to go in and sit in the front pew with the casket and a woman comes over to beat your brains in, that gets to be tough. Also you have the television cameras noting that and that doesn't play very well on the news.<sup>49</sup>

In the meantime, the savage attacks on Boone continued. Cumulatively, these assaults pushed a political hot button and made his firing almost inevitable. For Sargent, under incredible pressure, especially with his reelection campaign less than a year away, the situation was deteriorating fast.

By the spring of 1973, the governor's staff and Goldmark realized that Boone had to go. They were convinced that he was a weak administrator and that his continued presence jeopardized the entire reform program. Goldmark felt that if Boone was going under, there was no point in wasting any more currency on him. Despite his public pronouncements, Sargent was not disposed to tolerate further chaos, which had taken its toll. The time of genuine reckoning had arrived. Sargent explained:

The main reason the whole corrections thing became very tough wasn't merely the fact we had some violence, somebody killed, the fact we had a strike and all that sort of stuff. It was the day-to-day pressure from the newspapers. When you're in public life and you get a few bad headlines it isn't all that much fun, but when you get them day after day after day and week after week after week, then it gets rugged and you have to do something about it.<sup>50</sup>

In the end, Sargent capitulated, but it was not an easy choice for him. He had great respect for Boone and knew how much the commissioner had suffered during the long ordeal. Once Sargent decided to fire him, the question became how to do so without appearing to surrender to the anti-Boone forces.

On the evening of June 20, 1973, the governor went on television and announced his decision. The tone of his speech was conciliatory. He felt it was important to praise Boone and his cause, even as he fired him. The stormy Boone era was over.

Ultimately, the governor replaced Boone with Frank A. Hall, who was deputy commissioner of the North Carolina Department of Prisons. Before long, Hall restored peace to Walpole and the other prisons. He succeeded in keeping the prisons relatively safe and orderly, while cautiously implementing his package of reforms.

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### **Sargent versus Dukakis**

It is interesting to compare Francis Sargent with Michael Dukakis. In many respects, they were the antithesis of each other, offering a vivid contrast between the pragmatist and the idealist, the affable honest broker and the detached policy wonk. Sargent was more friendly and less driven than Dukakis. They took an instant dislike to each other at their first meeting. The two governors differed sharply in style and personality. Where Dukakis was cold, aloof, and arrogant, Sargent displayed warmth, charm, and a remarkable lack of arrogance; where Dukakis was stiff, self-righteous, and a paragon of virtue, Sargent was relaxed, flamboyant, and profane; where Dukakis was viewed as a technocrat and a know-it-all, Sargent was perceived as a good listener who reached out for the views of others. Dukakis was almost devoid of a sense of humor and therefore unable to empathize and soothe chafed egos the way Sargent did.



About the only characteristic the two men shared was their personal frugality.

While Sargent had his strengths, he also had his weaknesses. He hated to fire people — his most painful task was firing John Boone. He also had difficulty relating to blacks. As a public manager, Sargent did not focus on details and had a short attention span nor did he become absorbed in economic development. He was bored by fiscal and administrative issues. He recognized their importance in principle and appointed excellent people to handle them, but he assigned them little priority and preferred not to learn much about them. Hence, he chose not to heed the Cassandra-like warnings of his budget director and left his successor, Michael Dukakis, a large deficit estimated to be somewhere around \$200 million.

Sargent's style was diametrically opposite to that of his nemesis. His centralized management ran directly counter to Dukakis's hands-on managerial style. Altshuler puts it even more crisply: "Sargent felt comfortable delegating, and he had no apparent sense of competitiveness with his appointees. He viewed himself as a conductor rather than star soloist and delighted in surrounding himself with talent."<sup>51</sup> Dukakis was more the star soloist who found it difficult to delegate. Advised of his shortcomings, the "Duke" attempted to change his image with a makeover. After losing the governorship to Edward King in 1978, he won it back in 1982 by convincing voters that he was a new, humble, more mellow figure ready to listen. There are many styles of leadership, so this is not to say that one style is better than another; but there are significant differences.

With due adjustment for contrasts in their style, character, and personality, there was a final dissimilarity. Sargent did not have an ideological center, which gave him a broader range in decision making. He was oriented to make judgments case by case. Like a classic manager, he retained the facts long enough to make a decision, then purged his mind of them. What emerged over time was a governor who consistently protected the weak underdog and the environmentalists while acting in ways that kept him in tune with the populace. Did Sargent change in any important sense the way governors make their decisions? Close observers of gubernatorial policy conclude that he did. Alan Altshuler sums up:

Sargent, in short, was a man of politics and concrete decisions. While resistant to ideology in the abstract, his decisions expressed a consistent set of liberal values. His interest in management was confined, in general, to selecting key personnel and inspiring their loyalty. He was a reactive decision-maker in most circumstances, one who responded to crises and chose from among the options brought to him by staff. But he also gave the highest priority to recruiting a diverse and talented staff; he could be extremely patient when they needed time to generate fresh options; and he was willing to take major risks on behalf of policies about which he cared deeply. He had his blind spots, most notably in those areas where fiscal and administrative detail count for a lot. But he led an exciting administration with unfailing decency, compassion and integrity.<sup>52</sup>

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## The Sargent Legacy

Frank Sargent was respected and admired on Beacon Hill, where he earned a reputation for objectivity and wise judgment. To this day, Democrats and Republicans still speak fondly of him. Reflecting on his own experience, former House speaker David Bartley remarked, "Frank Sargent was one of the finest human beings I've ever met, and certainly

the best governor I've served under."<sup>53</sup> Former Senate president Kevin Harrington put it somewhat differently, "Sargent had great instincts. He had a political piano tuner's ear; he had perfect pitch. He could smell whether an idea was good, great, or bad."<sup>54</sup>

To his credit, Sargent took more stand-up positions on legislation than most of his predecessors, and in his six years he received the highest percentage of bipartisan support. Add to the legislative record the policy innovations introduced through executive orders, gubernatorial memoranda, and rules and regulations, and the record is even more impressive. He was the first governor to address the manifold problems of urban life. His cabinet plan matched the best organizational theory of the decade. No other Republican leader in Massachusetts had so consciously and successfully developed a strategy for involving experts and academics in the various stages of policymaking. Many of his appointments were bold and courageous.

As historians struggle with the Sargent legacy, they will no doubt remember him for his balanced transportation policy and his policy option of deinstitutionalization. Whatever the verdict on specific policies, they will remember him most of all as an environmental visionary. He did more for the cause of the environment than any of his predecessors and successors.

But Sargent was not an original thinker or a great idea person. He relied on Al Kramer, Robert Yasi, and others to feed him ideas. They were a dependable policy source. His wife, Jessie, was the driving force behind Jerome Miller and the mental health efforts. Of the many participants who influenced policy and programs, the governor's staff and the *Boston Globe* played an invaluable role. Sargent had a good working relationship with the publishers of the *Globe* as well as with other media allies.

In *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, Ronald Heifetz distinguishes between leaders who presume that their responsibility is to make decisions and leaders who help others to confront problems. Sargent clearly falls into the latter category. He believed in participatory democracy and sought to develop ways of having ordinary people get involved in making critical decisions that affected their lives deeply. Such a phenomenon was entirely new in state politics. Until Sargent came along, the question of empowering nonestablishment groups remained largely unexplored and undefined.

One of Sargent's most important legacies was the extent to which he reshaped the state's judiciary. He filled ninety-seven judgeships, both at the district and at the superior court levels. This large number of vacancies was the result mainly of a new law that required judges to retire at age seventy. William Young, the governor's legal counsel, was largely responsible for coordinating this effort. While patronage considerations were taken into account in appointing district court judges, the same was not true with regard to superior court judges, who were chosen strictly on merit. Since there were only a few blacks on the bench, diversity was also a factor. Sargent appointed David Nelson, a highly respected black lawyer, to the superior court. Nelson later became a federal district court judge. Overall, the quality of Sargent's judicial appointments was of the highest rank.

Frank Sargent died on October 22, 1998, at the age of eighty-three. The *Boston Globe* published an editorial that captured both his political and his personal legacy. It is worth quoting at length:

Francis W. Sargent always acted as if his six years as governor were the most enjoyable accident that could befall a man. "I got a hell of a big kick out of it," he told the *Globe's* John Powers this summer.

The sentiment was mutual. Nearly everyone at the State House from 1969 to 1975 drew on Sargent's infectious sense of enjoyment. This included his top lieutenants as well as the Democratic leaders in the Legislature. If he had an afternoon meeting with House Speaker David Bartley, Sargent said, he would put out a press release in the morning blasting him for something or other just so the meeting would start off on the right foot.

But he did not see politics as a game of tricks requiring deception and guile. He was a most straightforward political executive, taking on issues with boldness and, often, vision. He presided during a period of significant transition, when the state was implementing its takeover of welfare from the cities and towns and was also taking more responsibility for funding local education and school construction.

One of his most memorable actions was stopping construction of the planned Inner Belt of highways. His appointments were superior; his Cabinet is widely viewed as the best of the modern era, with the possible exception of the Cabinet in Michael Dukakis's third term.

Sargent, an architect by training and a fisherman by choice, would laugh at attempts to list his accomplishments, but they were considerable. The fact that he made the state feel good in the process is a legacy to be treasured, and remembered.<sup>55</sup>

Frank Sargent made substantial progress in solving the problems that the citizens of Massachusetts faced, a goal that had eluded his predecessors. Single-minded and secure in his convictions, he responded effectively to contentious social issues. Several decades later, such issues still generate controversy. He made his share of mistakes, but he also made adjustments and moved on. Despite the fact that his career ended in defeat, he made a significant impact on the governorship itself. By seizing the policy initiative and exercising vigorous leadership, he broke the mold and turned the governor's office into an instrument for social change. That is his most enduring legacy. ❀

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## Notes

1. For a good analysis of the development of the office, see Victoria Schuck, "The Massachusetts Governorship: Hamstrung by History?" in Robert R. Robbins, ed., *The Role of the Governor in Massachusetts* (Medford, Mass.: Tufts University, 1961), 11–75. See also Leslie Lipson, *The American Governor from Figurehead to Leader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939).
2. For governors who presided in the Bay State during this period, see Robert C. Wood and Bradbury Seasholes, "The Image of the Governor as a Public and Party Leader," in *ibid.*, 77–100. The authors interviewed five living former governors, namely, Channing H. Cox, Leverett Saltonstall, Robert F. Bradford, Christian A. Herter, and Foster Furcolo. They began their first terms of office in 1921, 1939, 1947, 1953, and 1957, respectively.
3. Interview with William Sargent, December 22, 1998.
4. Frank Phillips, "Ex-foes Recall a Man of Charm, Wit," *Boston Globe*, October 23, 1998.
5. Jessie F. Sargent, *The Governor's Wife* (Boston: Marlborough House, 1973), vii.
6. John Powers, "Sargent at Ease," *Boston Globe*, October 1, 1998.
7. Robert H. Boyle, "Maverick Head of an Odd State," *Sports Illustrated*, April 22, 1974, 51.
8. Sargent, *The Governor's Wife*, 48, 59.



9. William Sargent interview.
10. Douglas Foy told this story at the memorial service for Frank Sargent, Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church, Wellesley, Massachusetts, November 4, 1998.
11. Jay Williams, letter to the editor, *Boston Globe*, November 1, 1998.
12. Interview with Richard Manley, November 5, 1998.
13. Boyle, "Maverick Head of an Odd State," 58.
14. Powers, "Sargent at Ease."
15. William Sargent interview.
16. Interview with Alan Altshuler, December 10, 1998.
17. Alan Altshuler, "Sarge in Charge," *Journal of State Government* 63 (July/August 1989): 156.
18. Martha Weinberg, *Managing the State* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977), 54–55. This excellent study, which I have relied on heavily, treats Sargent's governorship in detail. However, I disagree with Weinberg when it comes to the Department of Mental Health. During his watch, Sargent exerted significant executive control over DMH, especially with regard to deinstitutionalization and the closing of three state mental hospitals.
19. Boyle, "Maverick Head of an Odd State," 50–58.
20. See Charles Kenney and Robert L. Turner, *Dukakis: An American Odyssey* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988), 70.
21. Powers, "Sargent at Ease."
22. Ken Hartnett, "The Compleat Political Angler — He Lures Voters with Warmth," *Boston Globe*, November 3, 1974.
23. David Nyhan, "An Able Leader and a Great Guy," *Boston Globe*, October 23, 1998.
24. Hartnett, "The Compleat Political Angler."
25. Powers, "Sargent at Ease."
26. Interview with Al Kramer, December 8, 1998. Kramer contends that Governor Sargent sent in troops more as a defensive than an offensive measure.
27. William Sargent interview.
28. Boyle, "Maverick Head of an Odd State," 52.
29. Weinberg, *Managing the State*, 46.
30. John Powers, "Francis W. Sargent, Ex-governor, Dies," *Boston Globe*, October 23, 1998.
31. For a useful, if highly partisan account of the highway controversy up to 1970, see Alan Lupo et al., *Rites of Way* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971). This study is a parochial advocacy piece that chronicles the dispute up to the point of the moratorium and leaves off with the question of what should be done next.
32. Altshuler, "Sarge in Charge," 160.
33. Lupo et al., *Rites of Way*, 106.
34. For a good analysis of the Boston Transportation Planning Review, see Ralph A. Gakenheimer, *Transportation Planning as Response to Controversy: The Boston Case* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976).
35. See David Luberoff, Alan Altshuler, and Christie Baxter, *Mega-Project: A Political History of Boston's Multibillion Dollar Artery/Tunnel Project* (Cambridge: Taubman Center for State and Local Government, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 1994), 14.
36. For a detailed account of Sargent's opposition to the Vietnam War and his rationale for supporting the so-called Shea bill, see Francis W. Sargent, "The Issue Is Joined," in *The People vs. Presidential War*, compiled and edited by John M. Wells with Maria Wilhelm (New York: Dunellen Company, 1970), 133–135.
37. Al Kramer interview.
38. See the eulogy delivered by Al Kramer at the Frank Sargent memorial service.
39. See Report of the Modernization Systems Unit, "Management Systems for Massachusetts," June 1971, and Robert Casselman, "State Reorganization: Hoax or Hope," *Boston Globe*, January 14, 1973.
40. Weinberg, *Managing the State*, 141.
41. Robert C. Wood, *Suburbia* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), 246–252.
42. Interview with Robert C. Wood, November 18, 1998.
43. For a more detailed account of this episode, see Richard A. Hogarty, "Downsizing the Massachusetts Mental Health System," *New England Journal of Public Policy* 12, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 1996): 26–27.
44. The following account is based primarily on a case study by Stephanie Gould, "Jerome Miller

- and the Department of Youth Services," Parts A and B (Cambridge: John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 1976).
45. See the editorial "Politics and Children," *Boston Globe*, April 12, 1972.
  46. The following account relies heavily on a case study by Colin S. Diver, "Park Plaza," Parts A, B, and C (Cambridge: John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 1975).
  47. This and the following paragraphs follow closely a case study prepared by Alan Konefsky et al., "Massachusetts Department of Correction," Parts 1, 2, and 3 (Cambridge: John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 1977).
  48. Ibid., Part 2, 4.
  49. Ibid., 19.
  50. Ibid., Part 3, 9.
  51. Altshuler, "Sarge in Charge," 158.
  52. Ibid., 159.
  53. Powers, "Francis W. Sargent, Ex-governor, Dies."
  54. Letter from Kevin Harrington, January 4, 1999.
  55. Editorial, *Boston Globe*, October 23, 1998.