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Editor's Note

Padraig O'Malley

University of Massachusetts Boston, padraig.omalley@umb.edu

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Editor's Note

by *Padraig O'Malley*

The failed coup in the USSR and its consequences: the collapse of communism, the disintegration of the Soviet empire and the emergence of voracious ethnic nationalisms in the form of newly proclaimed nation states; the civil war in a Yugoslavia that teeters on the brink of dissolution; the continuing rumblings of discontent in a Czechoslovakia that is trying mightily to hold itself from falling apart, the shifting patterns of realignment in much of Central and Eastern Europe — each of these events seems to be counterintuitive in some fundamental sense. After all, hasn't the world become a global marketplace? Hasn't interdependence become the catch cry of the 1990s? Aren't nations acknowledging their mutual needs and interests and surrendering their sovereignty to transnational superstructures such as the European Community, the new paradigm?

Besides, almost all that happened in those tumultuous months occurred with a suddenness and completeness that defied analysis. In the end the old order didn't die a slow, lingering death, it simply dropped dead. The transformation of Eastern and Central Europe and the USSR mocked conventional shibboleths. Events caught us off guard not only in their happening but in the manner of their happening: volumes of exquisitely crafted theory, decades of arcane analysis, libraries of wisdom, multiplicities of social models, and volumes of behavioral simulations were all found to be woefully wanting. In the end, change had more to do with the undoing of the long-suppressed aspirations of indigenous peoples; and because they were long repressed, they were assumed to be nonexistent. In the postmodern world, "nationalism" was, well, a dirty word. The virtues of diversity were, of course, extolled, for who would not extol diversity as an expression of difference? But the flip side of diversity is division, which is not so quick to be acknowledged because it is not so readily amenable to remedy.

Which brings us, in a roundabout way perhaps, to this issue of the *New England Journal of Public Policy*. It is an eclectic mix. Its range and diversity, however, illuminate one of the less considered aspects of public policy: the fact that policy itself, despite the efforts of policy theorists, and on occasion policymakers and practitioners, to invest it with the trappings of rational, scientific method, rarely if ever is defined in politically or culturally neutral terms. The pretense that this is not so suggests that there exists some set of objective criteria that are impervious to either political or cul-

Padraig O'Malley is senior associate at the John W. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs, University of Massachusetts at Boston.

tural dictates. In reality, of course, nothing could be further from the truth; policy is the product of our particular circumstances, of the normative yardsticks and values that imbue our political and cultural discourse, often with unforeseen impacts on and dislocations to its intended beneficiaries. In short, we often kill or at the very least maim with kindness.

In his reflective essay, “Professing American Literature: A Report from Brazil,” Arnold Gordenstein, who taught American literature at a Brazilian university, makes this point. “My own academic politics, a blend of old liberalism and 1960s radicalism, constituted a cultural imperialism of its own,” he says. “I made certain choices in my teaching that were meaningful to me but . . . less meaningful to my students.” Accordingly, he developed courses “that privileged texts by the underdogs and the minorities” and presented them “as free from assumptions about manifest destiny.” “I tried to suggest,” he writes, “an approach to the Brazilians’ own racial and sexual problems by indirectness and by modeling, by displaying the United States, warts and all, and then the U.S. response, warts and all.”

Brazilian students, however, were unwilling to aspire to the American dream and unable to see the social dimensions of the failure portrayed in the books Gordenstein had selected for study. “My Brazilian students,” he observes wryly, “usually did not see the fates of these fictional characters as socially resonant catastrophes but mainly as personal disappointments” — the values these “canons” of education “once represented in the United States were never assumed in Brazil.” In a culture like that of Brazil, “where you begin with a more relaxed and tolerant attitude to individual foibles based on a deeper skepticism about the possibilities of social improvement through a chronically, almost acceptably corrupt central government, the largest discernible values have to do with family and blood loyalties.” In short, Brazilian life and literature, he concludes, reflect “a flight from social issues to a concern for smaller nuclei like the family.” In the end, Gordenstein comes to a disturbing realization: the easy socially conscious assumptions he brought to his work were an anathema to the authoritarian military regime, noteworthy for its murderous excesses, which ruled the country: “I had been encouraging catastrophe. For if my students absorbed and acted on Thoreau in the way I was suggesting, they might land not in Concord jail but in an unmarked grave.”

Gordenstein’s larger thesis — that the values at the core of our cultural composition cannot easily be universalized — is the implicit theme of three other essays — Sharlene Voogd Cochrane’s “Compelled to Speak: Women Confronting Institutional Racism, 1910–1950,” Paul L. Atwood’s “The Vietnam War Memorial and the Gulf War,” and Richard A. Hogarty’s “Searching for a UMass President: Transitions and Leaderships, 1970–1991.”

Cochrane’s article is close in form to a case study. She explores the efforts by women both within and outside the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) to make the organization confront its own racism. Her focus is the Boston YWCA, and she unfolds the study by drawing on the experiences of Lucy Miller Mitchell, the first woman of color to be elected to the Boston YWCA board. The YWCA moved more quickly than other similar institutions to shed its racism. One important reason for this, Cochrane contends, was “the power of women speaking out in an institution that encouraged them to make connections between their faith and their daily lives.” Their strategy, writes Cochrane, “was a profound commitment to connecting talk and action. They kept issues alive and raised points at every opportunity. They constantly

set a context for and educated others to see the connections between YWCA rhetoric, ideals, and practices.” This sense of being compelled to act gave women an intensity, a fervor, which overcame other powerful cultural messages of racism and silence and gave them a clarity of purpose and courage to act. Their voicing of the moral argument was “unending, coherent, and powerful.”

Some of Cochrane’s data makes painfully clear the extent and scope of racism in institutional form that set the context for race relations in Boston: no students of color were allowed to live in any of Boston’s college dormitories until the 1920s; women of color looking for lodging in Boston in the late twenties were denied access to the YWCA. In the words of one of its board’s presidents: “It is part of our job to fit the girl into the proper environment.” For women of color that meant boarding in private homes because “we [the board] believe they will be happiest among colored people”; no nursing schools or hospitals accepted women of color for nurses’ training until 1929; and the YWCA swimming pool was not open to all women of color until the 1940s. Who are we to throw the first stone at South Africa?

Paul Atwood discusses the debate over the “meaning” of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C., and relates this to the revision of the “Vietnam syndrome” as it has been played out in recent U.S. armed interventions overseas. Considerable political struggle over precisely which values the monument should enshrine occurred during the design phase of the memorial. Some proponents wished for a contemplative, antiwar message, while others believed the memorial should embody traditional martial themes. This division, Atwood argues, continued and extended the debate over the Vietnam War itself. The issue in the Gulf, Atwood postulates, was substantially the same as in Indochina — the United States attempted to foster its hegemony in both regions, to protect its dominance from indigenous threats, and to promote the continued rule of native elites friendly to U.S. interests. Throughout the eighties, Atwood contends, substantial cultural productions helped to erase the real memories of the tragedy and divisiveness of the war by “normalizing” the Vietnam veteran and portraying his role in standard heroic terms, thereby assisting in the manufacture of a new public consensus that employment of military options should be subject to the “will to win,” the use of maximum firepower, and an “acceptable” number of U.S. casualties. This “historical and cultural revisionism,” he says, “contributed to public willingness to employ devastating force against Grenada, Panama, and Iraq.”

Richard Hogarty’s article on presidential searches is a sequel to his essay “The Search for a Massachusetts Chancellor: Autonomy and Politics in Higher Education” (*New England Journal of Public Policy* 4, no. 2). In his current article, he examines the tension between cultural constructs and value systems in a context that juxtaposes the pristine requirements of the academy and the pragmatic demands of the polity. Hogarty quotes from *Choosing a College President: Opportunities and Constraints*, a seminal study of presidential searches by Judith Block McLaughlin and David Riesman: “Like perhaps no other event in the life of an institution, the search for a president reveals the politics, protocols, and promise of the American academic enterprise.” They might also have added “and the cultural relativism of the major players in the selection procedure.”

Reviewing five presidential searches that have taken place at the University of Massachusetts since 1970, Hogarty concludes that “because of the culture of the state, the search becomes political, no matter what committee structure or procedural safeguards are employed. Consequently, the key to a successful search depends to a large

extent on the ‘representativeness’ of the process and the participation of all parties-at-interest. For the search to be considered legitimate,” Hogarty concludes, “it must include the major stakeholders within the university community.” Exclusion of faculty members from search committees frequently causes antagonism to the searches. “Such antagonism tends to generate suspicion and mistrust, which in turn undermine the effectiveness of the incumbent.”

John C. Berg looks at value structures in a different framework in what he calls “Beyond the Party-Group Continuum.” Studies in the 1960s found that Massachusetts was a state with strong parties and weak interest groups. In the 1970s and 1980s, as the Republican Party shrank, party competition declined, conflict within the Democratic Party grew, and interest groups became more important — and will probably remain important, Berg suggests, despite the Republican gains of 1990. However, while interest groups are now much stronger than the parties, they do not dominate Massachusetts politics. They are kept from doing so not by the parties, but by intergroup conflict.

Interest groups, according to Berg, “are a big and growing business in Massachusetts.” The number of registered lobbyists continues to rise, as do both interest-group spending and campaign contributions. Until 1990, Massachusetts seemed to be growing more and more similar to a traditional one-party state, with the Democrats holding a dominant electoral position but with little or no coherence on policy issues. As in the old one-party South, this made interest groups more and more important as the organizing force in policymaking.

But Massachusetts, says Berg, differs from the old one-party states of the South in that it has strong labor unions, environmental organizations, women’s groups, and grassroots groups such as MassPIRG. These interest groups are not strong enough, singly or collectively, he posits, to overcome the economic weight and political power of the state’s businesses, but they are strong enough to prevent the development of the kind of single-interest business dominance common in the Old South and West. Moreover, there are also important divisions within the business community. The situation in Massachusetts, therefore, might better be characterized as one of interest-centered conflict rather than interest-group dominance.

Bruce Wundt outlines the consequences and policy implications of the large cuts in defense expenditures on the economy of Connecticut. That state’s economy enjoyed considerable prosperity during the 1980s as a result of its reliance on the defense industry. Now that defense expenditure is being cut back, Connecticut is faced with the task of diversifying into new markets and products. Two industries in particular — aircraft and aircraft parts and ship- and boat-building — have averaged greater than 21 percent of total manufacturing employment in Connecticut during the twenty-three years between 1964 and 1987. In contrast countrywide, these industries account for about 4.2 percent of total U.S. manufacturing employment. When the multiplier impact of these two industries on output and employment is taken into account, these two industries either directly or indirectly account for one in four jobs in Connecticut. Furthermore, a one percent reduction in employment in these two crucial industries will result in a four tenths of one percent drop in total manufacturing employment.

For the entire 1964–1987 period, total manufacturing employment in Connecticut fell; however, increasing federal expenditures on defense and its concomitant impact on employment in defense-related industries, particularly from 1977 on, largely offset this loss so that employment fluctuations were relatively mild. Correspondingly, in recent years the state has experienced greater instability in manufacturing employ-

ment. The implications for policymakers, says Wundt, are that Connecticut should not direct its efforts toward replacing the defense industry with another dominant industry. Rather, the state must encourage the expansion of industries that would not only increase the manufacturing base but also provide stability in employment. Given this objective, he suggests that state policymakers focus their efforts on promoting the expansion of industries that are compatible with the state's economic structure, such as certain medical instruments, printing, chemicals, and textiles and apparel industries.

"Representativeness" is also the theme of Shaun O'Connell's essay, "Representative Men." Reviewing six books, one about an actual man and five about fictional men, O'Connell sees them as attempts to define "representative men" of the 1980s, "an era," he observes, "when the worst were full of passionate intensities, particularly among men." Each antiheroic man in these books, he concludes, was "selfish, domineering, dangerous to women, and deceitful, yet each man was also committed to a system of values and ideas that made him an interesting case history — values which, in some instances, redeemed his failings."

As usual, O'Connell, in his understated way, challenges us to relate literary and cultural values to public policy issues, and, as usual, they invariably illuminate the elastic dimensions of public policy with more clarity than more rigid socioeconomic dogmas. 🐼