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Editor's Note

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Editor's Note

Padraig O'Malley

The political hangover the country endures every four years after the binge of presidential politics will, like hangovers of a different kind, ease with the passage of time, the ingestion of appropriate bromides, and a little abstentionism, unless one is of the addictive inclination, in which case a hair of the political dog that bit us will suffice to keep the individual adequately oiled.

It is, after all, only four years to the millennium, the challengers are warming up, the handicappers are working the odds, and the president-reelect is already a lame duck, a condition that automatically afflicts any politician who can't succeed himself in office. The clock, as former football great Jack Kemp warned us ad nauseam, is running out on the twentieth century and the country can't afford a time out although a time out is precisely what the doctor would prescribe, if only so we might try to find a quiet corner in which to figure out where the hell we are.

One thing is certain: we do not inhabit either of the countries Bill Clinton and Bob Dole would have us believe we do, but now that their forays into nonsense are over, to the relief of all the would-be victims of the candidates' attempts to clobber them into banana-land, we might take refuge for a moment in the solitude of reflection, try to place the American century into historical perspective, gauge our contributions or lack thereof to the century coming to a close and our responsibilities to the next, which we have woefully failed to acknowledge during America's watch.

But solitude in our culture is deviant — Why play around with solitude when one can turn to loneliness for relief? In the fog that substitutes for vision we are unable to see our way forward, unconcerned about our waywardness. We have, however, become more proficient at moral stumbling — staggering requires its own motor skills; more impervious to the cries of the distressed; more dismissive of safety nets; more unaware than ever, despite the shrinking boundaries of the global village of which we are part, of the wretched masses huddled on our doorsteps. Reflection in our culture is an aberration, a pursuit of questionable purpose, perhaps even of subversive intent, something to suspect rather than appreciate.

In a paraphrase of Yogi Berra's immortal words, we came to a fork in the road and we took it. Which is all in the way of introducing this issue of the *New England Journal of Public Policy*. The articles featured here, while spanning a very broad spectrum of public policy, have several unifying themes. They are all case studies in one way or another of the incompetence that is an essential feature of the public policy

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process in a democratic culture, of the constraints in the way of making change, no matter how obviously desirable or in the interest of the public good; of the propensity for the human dimension to unglue the most well-conceived plans; of the inefficiencies that are the hallmark of consultation and transparency and the even greater inefficiencies that accompany nontransparency and lack of consultation; of the necessity, if practitioners are to have a snowball's chance of achieving successful outcomes, of being able to define with what I venture to call severe clarity the objectives of policy, the interests of the various stakeholders, the strategies that must be deployed to accommodate the often competing interests these constituencies represent, of the powerful and frequently underestimated influence of self-interest and outright prejudice, invariably involved in the guise of noble altruism, in what gets done and how it gets done. To some extent the latter is reassuring; no model of policy design, no plan of policy implementation, no consideration of process, no exercise in outreach, no limit of communication, consultation, and inclusion is immune to the vagaries of the human personalities involved. In the end we are at the mercy of our foibles, not the World Wide Web. The Internet that counts is in the back of our heads, not in the guts of our toy machines.

This issue is notable in two respects: first, for carrying two articles by the same author, a practice generally considered to be a no-no in the business, and second, for two separate authors alluding to the writings of the Nigerian Nobel prize-winning author Chinua Achebe to describe the state of the public realm in Connecticut, a state we are not accustomed to thinking of in terms of third world parallels, especially in view of the fact that it is the state with the highest per capita income in the country.

The two articles by Richard Hogarty are published for reasons of timeliness and pertinence, and because in an odd way they complement each other, reflecting the different ways institutions respond to changing circumstances, responses that are the product not only of the objectives that exist at a point in time but also of the institution's own history. "Downsizing the Mental Health System in Massachusetts: The Politics of Evasion," graphically demonstrates the appropriateness of the adage "Good intentions randomize behavior." In focusing on the circuitous perambulation of the decision-making processes that accompanied the eventual closure of Metropolitan State Hospital, Hogarty deftly illustrates the contradictions and conundrums with which the Massachusetts mental health system tried to come to grips over three decades, including policy shifts with respect to deinstitutionalization and privatization, the unforeseen outcomes that were spin-offs of both, and the institutional inability of the system to respond to the problems it faced in changing fiscal circumstances — and changing public attitudes toward mental health. One lesson which emerges is that large capital outlays, which appear justifiable given our current understanding of a problem, and that even effect economies of scale in attempting to provide for future needs may, in the long run, become both political and institutional albatrosses and constrain policy alternatives in a world of rapid technological change. Innovations must always be examined in the light of the penalties that accrue to the early starter.

In his second article, "UMass Chooses a Political President: The Politics of a Presidential Search," Hogarty continues his chronicling of the university's searches for either presidents or campus chancellors over the past ten years. This article, the fourth in the series, indicates that the objective of the presidential search underwent a fundamental redefinition, one made necessary for the institution to survive in a very harsh world of competition for the state's scarce resources. A university president is supposed to be many things to many constituencies; short of being a miracle worker, he or she

will inevitably fall short in some regard, and as is the current wont, he or she will inevitably be judged not with respect to what has been achieved but to what has been left undone.

Of the three major functions — academic leadership, business management (read fund-raising), and political sharpshooter — the first, academic leadership, has traditionally been the flagship function. Hence, search committees have usually occupied themselves with “national” searches (nothing less suffices for such distinguished positions!) for the impeccably credentialed Mr./Mrs./(oops!)/ Dr. Right, who often brings an unsurpassed knowledge of the impact of the culinary habits of minor microcosms on the ingestive tracts of the *Anthurium scherzerianum* to the job, but little in the way of an understanding of the capital needs of a large educational institution, the necessity for fiscal rectitude, the complexities of budgets, the complications of running a large organization with thousands of employees and tens of thousands of customers, and the relation of all these factors to the recruitment and retention of top-rate academic talent and appeal to a top-rate student body. It is perhaps not surprising that average tenure in the hallowed post at the average university is about five years, part of the problem being that those who are often the most assiduously wooed are the most conspicuously unqualified.

The stresses of the ivory tower and the professorial absentmindedness associated with the pursuit of Pure Knowledge transcend grubby concerns about filthy lucre and the still more grubby pursuits that go into its accumulation. For a state university, dependent for its very existence on the largess of the state legislature, it would seem self-servingly obvious that without a president accomplished in the political arts of state lobbying and the nuances of state legislative politics, especially in an era of massive public sector cutbacks and the political ideology of perennial downsizing, its chances of survival in the wild and wicked world beyond its campuses’ serene boundaries are at best less than problematic and at worst grim as the Reaper himself.

And so it proved to be. There was a time in the mid-1980s when *Time* magazine singled out the Boston campus of the University of Massachusetts as one of the ten most promising, up-and-coming young public education institutions in the country. The Amherst campus was already straddling the giddy heights with references to its being the Berkeley of the East, an educational powerhouse in its own right.

But when the bubble of prosperity burst in Massachusetts, public higher education, never much of a state priority in the first place, became the dumping ground for the state’s financial woes, a convenient taxpayer scapegoat, with few strong advocates to press its claims for continued excellence — a state with too many colleges competitive with a Harvard or an MIT only diminishes the prestige of the latter. If exclusivity loses its advantage, what is the point of privilege? The Pew Higher Education Roundtable released a report in 1994 that pithily encapsulated the public sector’s position on public higher education. “The real anger at higher education,” it said, “comes principally from the makers and shapers of public policy — governors, legislators, regulators, heads of public agencies, and surprisingly, an increasing number from the world of private philanthropy.”

The boom dropped, and so did state appropriations: from \$352 million in 1988 to \$271 million in 1992. It was in real terms a drop of 26 percent over sixteen years compared with a drop of 11 percent nationally, namely, cuts two and a half times greater than those which the rest of the country had to bear in the years of national austerity that followed the financial shenanigans of the Reagan years. Hogarty catalogues the damage

to the Massachusetts system: at Amherst the combined verbal and math SAT scores for the entering class declined from 1050 in 1989 to a low of 994 in 1994. Tuition increased from \$2,000 in 1988 to \$4,400 in 1995. With fees, room, and board, it cost \$9,702 for state residents and \$16,048 for out-of-staters, making it one of the most expensive state universities in the country. UMass Boston no longer finds itself among the cerebral newcomers on the block. The aging buildings on the five campuses need close to one billion dollars for repairs. And if this accrual of deficits were not enough, Massachusetts ranks thirty-eighth among the fifty states in per capita state taxes appropriated for public higher education. In the end, if the university's trustees had not chosen state Senate president William M. Bulger to fill the position of president of the statewide university system, the post would have had to be filled by another person with the same name. The paradigm has shifted; just how extensive that shift was is painstakingly detailed by Hogarty, and many in academe are slow to grasp its implications.

The two articles on Connecticut also complement each other. In "The Trouble with Connecticut" and "The Battle for City Hall: What Do We Fight Over?" Kenneth Long and Louise Simmons, respectively, examine the failure of the political institutions in the state to execute their redistributive role. Indeed, both articles pose disturbing questions for policymakers, questions that go way beyond the particular circumstances of Connecticut — and even the United States. Connecticut has the highest per capita income of any state in the country. Forty percent of all Connecticut households have incomes in excess of \$50,000 compared with 24 percent of all American households; the median household income is 39 percent above the national median. The state's richest municipality, Weston, has a median household income of more than \$100,000, which is close to five times greater than that of Hartford, the state's largest city, which manages to scrape by on a median household income of little more than \$22,000. But this is only the last of the inequities that are the hallmark of the state. Collectively, 17 percent of its four largest cities' residents receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). This is approximately twenty-two times the median rate for the state. Their crime rate is seven times higher than the state median, and renter-occupied housing (63%) is three times higher than the state median.

These figures are illustrative only of the breadth of the problem. Long systematically reveals the extent of the inequities that hold the state in a seemingly inexorable grip with all the attendant undesirable social, economic, and political impacts — high costs of living, localism, lack of leadership, and gross inequities in the tax system.

Simmons confines her analysis to Hartford, the state capital. While it accounts for more than 30 percent of employment, only 23 percent of the people who work in Hartford live there. In 1980 it ranked as the fourth poorest city in the country, and although Hartford had "improved" its position to eighth poorest by 1990, the percentage of the population living in poverty actually increased by 28 percent. One-quarter of its residents were on AFDC, and 39 percent of its children were living in poverty; nationally, Hartford ranked second in both regards. Racial segregation is endemic. In 1990 Hartford's population was 36 percent Afro-American and 32 percent Hispanic. The neighboring thirty-seven towns in the Hartford Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA) were more than 92 percent white.

The data cited here are not meant to portray Hartford, or Connecticut for that matter, as anomalies in our socioeconomic system. Rather, they are probably a lot more typical than we would like to believe, a manifestation of our own North/South economic and racial dichotomies, which go largely ignored and consequently unaddressed. Simmons

explores the way a coalition of progressive forces on the Hartford City Council tried to face these issues in the early nineties and demonstrates how, despite the core solidarity on the issues, the coalition was unable, for the main part, to meet the expectations of those who put it in office. She writes,

From 1991 to 1993 . . . an attempt at progressive governance by a multiracial coalition was fraught with difficulties. Tensions among progressives and among leadership from impoverished communities of color, responses of downtown interests and the media, fiscal crises and the unrelenting needs of the population, served to stymie redistributive efforts and led to electoral defeat.

Part of the problem was the manner in which interest groups of color, while united by the wretchedness of their circumstances, were unable to preserve their unity in the face of even marginal success — class and racial divisions operate at all levels. Competition for jobs, status, and resources among disempowered or newly empowered multiracial communities invariably plays havoc with their attempts to maintain a common front, and success in addressing some grievances often creates situations that generate new grievances and tensions that did not previously exist.

There is, of course, nothing dramatically new about this observation. What we should think more about, however, is the universality of the phenomenon and the policy implications and devastating impacts of the gross inequities in the distribution of income, wealth, and opportunity in the SMSAs of New York, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Los Angeles, and any other number of cities racially divided on social stability and the prospects for sustainable development at the local and international levels. In terms of maldistribution of income and concentration of wealth, Connecticut and South Africa are not all that dissimilar, the differences being of degree rather than of structure, and even the differences of degree are, in many regards, substantially less than we would like to believe and shocking when we put the disparities in the context of comparative levels of development. The Greater Johannesburg area, with a geography and socioeconomic landscape meticulously designed by apartheid, is not an awful lot different in terms of racial composition and income distribution from the major cities of the United States.

What sociologist Julius Wilson has to say, in *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*, about the collapse of the inner cities in the United States is as pertinent to Johannesburg as it is to Chicago. Indeed, in a paradoxical way, a township like Soweto — population three to four million — is more vibrant than the South Bronx or Central Los Angeles. The emergence of successful Afro-American/Hispanic middle classes in the latter led to “minority flight” as the better-off quickly abandoned the desperate straits of their ghettos in favor of the urban pastures beyond their prisonlike boundaries. Indeed, empowerment and the bettering of one’s position/condition in life were intimately equated with one’s ability to escape. Outward mobility was a measure of upward mobility. What was left was the detritus of these communities; bereft of their most resourceful, they became human scavenging grounds, hopelessness imploding upon itself — and we still wonder why the St. Petersburgs burn!

In contrast, there are many Sowetos in Soweto: the Soweto of black millionaires, the black upper-class Soweto, the middle-class Soweto, the lower-class black Soweto, the black impoverished Soweto, the black squatter camps, and the so-called informal settlements interspersed among all the Sowetos. What they all share in common is the stamp of the state’s apartheid-imposed blackness. With the ending of apartheid, black South

Africans with the resources — and there are many — and the burgeoning black professional and entrepreneurial classes that are emerging in the new South Africa are abandoning the Soweto of the old South Africa as soon as they can afford to, leaving behind them more impoverished, more homogeneously deprived, and more marginalized communities.

The point: differences that used to be considered in isolation can't be. We speak of the global village but have no inclination to walk its streets. The global village is not a sound bite; it is not about the instantaneousness of communication or the ubiquitous presence of *Dallas* or *Emergency 911* or *Seinfeld* or *Murphy Brown* or *Cosby* or Yankee baseball caps, or the Atlanta Olympics, or the preeminence of the Coca-Cola symbol, the universal symbol for a thirst more metaphorically implied than physically present.

The global village, global economy, and other forms of adverbial globalities have an all-purpose usefulness. In the symbolic sense and as sufficiently elegant mantras that require no exposition and less explanation, they convey a sense of pervasiveness that encourages a benign acceptance of the status quo; they encourage an egregious passivity rather than a willingness to reflect upon the paradox of the contradictions inherent in the juxtaposition of the two worlds; they elicit an unwillingness to define precisely what a village is, never mind the global dimensions of the undefined. We are subtly sidetracked, cajoled as it were, not to inquire into their content, never mind their meaning.

Guruism relies on snake poison rather than analysis: if Connecticut, the richest state in the richest country in the world, can't/won't address its structural problems of inequity and social injustice, if race remains a formidable barrier to advancement in a country that has at least made the occasional attempt to legislate the yardsticks for standards of equality of opportunity, what chance do the South Africas have, and beyond that the Mozambiques, Bangladeshes, Somalias, Sudans, and the hellholes that stretch across our globe, which are in fact the hallmark of our much-invoked global village?

The final two articles, "The Repeal of Rent Control in Cambridge" by Robert Moncreiff and "The Clean Water Act: Financing Combined Sewer Overflow Projects," by Clyde Barrow and William Hogan, deal with specific policy-related case studies. The former is a classic examination of citizen participation in the democratic process in action, how "ordinary folk" can use instruments such as the statewide initiative petition to take on, and in this instance defeat, what would appear to be a powerfully entrenched interest group, the deeply ideological, committed proponents of rent control in Cambridge, Massachusetts, a city with a legendary history of being on the cutting edge of the politically correct. Moncreiff's account of the campaign of a small group of citizens to repeal the rent control ordinance in Cambridge, which, one should add, had long ceased to serve the needs of the poor and elderly for whose benefit it was first enacted and had evolved into an entitlement program for middle- and upper-income tenants, is masterful. Its focus is on the innumerable legal obstacles, many cleverly disguised as "democratic" checks to the supposed unconstitutional havoc an enraged citizenry might wreak in a fit of antigovernment pique, that the state puts in the way of direct citizen participation in the legislative process.

Barrow and Hogan use the city of Fall River, Massachusetts, to demonstrate once again the unintended consequences of good intentions or, more accurately, poorly thought out intentions. In 1987 the U.S. Congress expanded the scope of the Clean Water Act to include combined sewer overflows (CSOs), despite the fact that it continued to reduce federal assistance for water pollution abatement, and despite the fact that CSO abatement is far more costly than previous water quality mandates. The result

is that many northeastern industrial cities are now subject to a federal mandate many of them cannot afford without extensive federal or state assistance, which is, of course, usually not forthcoming. Barrow and Hogan offer some remedial amendments to the Environmental Protection Agency's regulatory guidelines to ameliorate the fiscal impact on municipalities — but don't hold your breath. ❷