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## Editor's Note

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## Editor's Note

*Padraig O'Malley*

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I was struck by the absence of attention to questions relating to race, poverty, the housing crisis, and homelessness in the course of the weird, sometimes bizarre, and too often rancorous presidential campaign we have now, mercifully, put behind us. We know for sure that none of these issues was on George Herbert Walker Bush's agenda — the last four years have been an impressive expression of his distaste for such *trivial* concerns — no foreign policy nuances, no histories in the making, no late-night calls to world leaders, no articulation of New World Orders — although the latter seems to have eluded his grasp somewhere between enunciation and elucidation, not an unusual by-product of slipshod sloganeering, one more casualty of his difficulty with “the vision thing.”

We know that none of these issues crossed the lips of H. Ross Perot as he dithered hither and thither preaching the doctrine of puritanical economic housekeeping with the evangelical absolutism that only a billionaire three times over could alchemize. And we know that Bill Clinton eschewed these issues, too — perhaps in his efforts to endear himself to those elusive Reagan Democrats; perhaps not to be seen as the “tax and spend liberal Democrat,” the belittling epithet with which George Bush wanted so desperately to damn him; perhaps because a sensitivity to social issues was somehow unmasculine in this most decidedly macho presidential year; perhaps because drawing attention to the problems of the poor, the damaged, and the disadvantaged was to portray oneself as being “soft,” with wanting to do things for “them” — and we all know the code, to whom the “them” refers. God forbid we should have heard the word *race* in this year of the Los Angeles riots and the violent convulsions in our inner cities. What we did hear, however, is that there are no votes in championing the poor, the dispossessed, and those living on the margin. The rural and urban underclasses that are spreading like some invisible miasma across our country are condemned not to being forgotten but to something worse — to being ignored.

There was, of course, no public outcry because these issues were not addressed, even as they have become more acute. Our attention span is short. These are old issues. They have had their “fifteen minutes” of air time. Andy Warhol would approve.

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Los Angeles is a dim memory, long displaced by the electronic images of the devastation wrought by Hurricane Andrew. Our capacity to assimilate devastation is unlimited but, unfortunately, short-lived.

Four years ago, in the 1988 Summer/Fall issue of the *New England Journal of Public Policy*, we wrote,

[The two] presidential candidates, Michael Dukakis and George Bush, [proved] themselves extraordinarily adept time and again at not addressing any of the excruciatingly difficult choices a new administration will have to make. But the realities the new president will face cannot be indefinitely obscured. The prosperity we enjoy, the unparalleled splurge in consumption during the 1980s, has been fueled by borrowing against the future. Although this observation is not especially new — and repetition has robbed it of urgency — what we have yet to adequately grasp, that is, grasp to the point where the knowledge impels action, is the enormous cost of our excesses. The inescapable reality that that cost must now be met limits severely the choices open to us and has unsettling implications for the kind of society we may bequeath our children. We called the tune, danced with abandon to its seductive rhythms; now we must pay the piper.

But we have not paid the piper and, frankly, do not yet appear to be up to the challenge. The aspiration expresses itself a little more frequently perhaps, but the commitment is as weak and self-centered and shallow as ever.

Hence to this issue of the *New England Journal of Public Policy*. Public policy at the microlevel. None of the visionless clichés that pass for eloquent public discourse. But policy issues with intricate, complex dimensions, not amenable to easy remedy, posing alternative choices within shifting and sometimes treacherous parameters, especially when the underlying values are not so clear — issues, in short, that offer in their own *parochial* way a microcosm of the national landscape, the local tentacles of the many-headed monsters the new administration will have to face up to, especially when it comes down to having to make choices between outcomes and process.

Richard Hogarty, in the third of a series of articles on university presidential searches, highlights the conflict between trustees and faculty as one that often centers on the question of “process” versus “product.” The trustees of the University of Massachusetts were more than pleased with themselves for having made what, in their view, was an impressive choice for president, while many faculty were angered over what they considered to be a terrible process. Each side, in short, was dismayed at the other’s behavior.

“For more than twenty years,” Hogarty writes, “the trustees and faculty at UMass had fought over the question of power in presidential searches.” However, on this occasion the UMass board of trustees and its appointed search committee broke with past university governance policies and did something different. When they finished reviewing candidates, they had eliminated all but Michael K. Hooker, because they decided that he had the necessary competence, vision, and stature for the job. But in doing so, they breached what was crucial to many faculty: the principle of participatory democracy. Hogarty declares,

It is helpful to analyze the recent controversy in the framework of the community power debate, which contrasts the “power elite” approach to the study of power with the alternative “pluralist” explanation. Those who take the elitist approach

argue that there is a relatively permanent “top leadership” which decides the important questions, while the pluralists argue that any significant group in society has the capacity to win redress of its grievances if the group feels intensely about its problems and demands action.

Echoes of national administrations coming together or falling apart!

Douglas Reynolds explores some of the tensions and hopes associated with the creation of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor and the release of a master plan for cultural and physical-resource development that calls for new standards for private, local, state, and federal partnerships. Actions by the Corridor’s partners (the Corridor covers the length of the forty-six miles of Blackstone Valley running south from Worcester, Massachusetts, to Providence, Rhode Island) are shaped by both past and contemporary economic development issues. From 1920 to the present, textiles and related industries in the valley have suffered more bad years than good. The Corridor Commission is charged with the responsibility of finding and implementing strategies that socially and economically will enhance the Blackstone Valley’s material future by protecting its past. The multiple partnerships, Reynolds argues, between the federal government, two states (Massachusetts and Rhode Island), a score of communities, and a wide variety of interest groups mark a turning point in the evolution of public policy planning.

Perhaps most provocative is Reynolds’s proposition that

if we are to believe, for example, in industrialization as a transforming force worthy of the title “revolutionary,” we must also look at deindustrialization as a transforming force that holds revolutionary potential in undermining or making socially useful the jobs which industrial workers, their communities, their work cultures, and their children will come to find in deindustrializing areas, and in realigning the two-class society so increasingly clear in the valley today.

The Corridor Commission seeks the greatest possible impact from its projects, including “good jobs at good wages,” because it wants to serve as a model both for good development and for imaginative planning.

Historic preservation issues, embraced by both sides of the development battle, are seen as a cutting edge technique for both economic and cultural development — the legacy of deindustrialization is touted as “the valley’s special character.” In Reynolds’s view, the Corridor, therefore, represents an interdisciplinary ground floor and the fulcrum of several primary policy shifts, which will grow in the 1990s.

Reynolds states,

If public and private groups can take responsibility for our past . . . they must also be able to shape the future. This Janus-faced ideology bespeaks something that members of long-existing cultures have known for some time: history itself can produce a cultural legacy worthy of building upon. Such pride in place also takes the survivalist’s refuge in familiar territory, defensively hoping that history, and our buildings, can be turned against what in more pessimistic moments is seen as the mortality of our society.

At its best, Reynolds’s article offers us a paradigm of the consensual balancing of process and outcome that emphasizes cooperation, interdisciplinary planning,



and imagination; it is a paradigm that could be replicated successfully in other parts of the country that have been enduring the human and economic ravages of deindustrialization.

Ralph Rivera addresses questions of demographics, diversity, and equity in his analysis of the Latino community in Massachusetts. He argues that Massachusetts has undergone radical changes in its racial/ethnic composition in the past ten years. The Latino population, because of its extraordinary growth rate during the last two decades, is the largest racial/ethnic minority group in the state. Yet relatively little is known about this population owing to what Rivera calls the information gap, which he defines as the lack of basic information and analysis of the problems and needs of this population.

He contends that recognition of Latinos as a significant population which warrants attention in Massachusetts has come very slowly, even though the size and phenomenal growth of the Latino community has increasingly been the subject of discussion in the media and the business community throughout the United States. "Unlike blacks, who are concentrated in Boston . . . Latinos are dispersed geographically throughout the state. Their geographic distribution, combined with their limited economic and political power, have made Latinos victims of indifference and neglect in the commonwealth."

Rivera writes that "the new diversity has rekindled the historic tension between assimilation and pluralism as seen by the various English-only legislative initiatives." However, Rivera suggests that "instead of seeking the mythical 'melting pot,' the general public policy thrust should focus on facilitating acculturation and integration in ways that preserve ethnic identity, language, and cultural expressions."

The public educational system, Rivera maintains, has failed to respond to the needs of the Latino community.

This is particularly critical in inner-city schools where Latinos constitute a large percentage of the student population and in some cases make up the majority of students (for example, Lawrence, Holyoke, and Chelsea). Yet, because of the declining enrollment of white children in the public schools, fewer resources are being allocated to education; subsequently, cities tend to have very limited resources to support essential programs.

"It will be extremely difficult," Rivera concludes, "for Massachusetts to have an economically competitive economy without an economically competitive Latino work force. Consequently, policymakers must seek ways to assure full participation in the state's economy for this population."

Arthur Woolf focuses on the cost of home ownership in Vermont in the years 1975 to 1990. He defines the cost of home ownership as "the percentage of family income needed to finance an average-price home. Although prices skyrocketed during the 1980s, the actual cost of home ownership as a percentage of income was about 15 percent greater in 1990 than it was during the mid-1970s." His analysis indicates that price increases will moderate during the 1990s because of slower economic growth and changing demographic forces and that the cost of home ownership will continue to decline from the peak reached in 1988.

One of the major factors influencing the price of housing in Vermont is the increased demand caused by the changing demographics of the state. Woolf examines

Vermont's population statistics to show the magnitude of such influences on housing prices. The tremendous increase in the number of twenty-five- to thirty-four-year-olds, who place the highest demand on housing, puts a strain on the state's housing sector. "This helps to explain three interconnected events in the 1980s: lower overall state population growth than in the 1970s, a greater number of houses constructed in the 1980s as compared to the 1970s, and a rapid escalation of housing prices in the decade of the 1980s."

Vermont's surge in economic growth during the mid and late 1980s put additional demands on the state housing stock. The state's income growth in this period was one of the strongest in the nation . . . The growth came partly from higher wages and partly from an increasing number of dual-income households, both of which put upward pressure on the price of Vermont housing as higher incomes allowed buyers to purchase bigger, better, and more expensive homes.

Demographic changes, Woolf shows, will work to moderate future housing-price trends in the state as the number of Vermonters in their prime home-buying years declines.

Paul Levy and Michael Connor address the economic, social, physical, and engineering constraints that have to be taken into account in cleaning up Boston Harbor. The Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) was created in 1985 to undertake a massive public works program, including construction of a 1.3 billion-gallon-per-day sewage treatment plant and a sludge fertilizer processing plant, to end the decades-old practice of dumping sewage wastes into the ocean. The program will also cause water and sewer charges to rise dramatically during a fifteen-year period.

The project has raised a host of environmental and public policy issues: How should sludge by-products be disposed of or used by society? What is the proper placement of the effluent outfall for a sewage treatment plant of this magnitude discharging into Massachusetts Bay? What is the appropriate level of treatment to apply to wastewater? How can ratepayers be assured that their money is being spent on the highest environmental priorities?

Levy and Connor explain how the harbor became so polluted, describe the current cleanup program, analyze some of the most important issues that must be resolved in the course of that program, and discuss the benefits of the different cleanup elements to the environmental health of Boston Harbor and Massachusetts Bay.

The MWRA, [they conclude], has made significant progress and remained on schedule. The project has already resulted in a cleaner harbor. MWRA spent more on capital improvements in its first four years of existence than the [Metropolitan District Commission] was permitted to spend in the previous twenty years. A number of "immediate upgrade" projects required to improve the interim performance of the treatment plant have been completed. These projects have already decreased the amount of grit and scum discharged to the harbor by four thousand gallons per day and reduced the discharge of coliform bacteria to the harbor. . . . In addition, the increased pumping capacity at Deer Island has reduced the number and amount of [combined sewer overflow] discharges dramatically, so that area beaches are the cleanest they have been since measurements began in the 1930s. But the largest improvement to the harbor occurred when sludge dumping

ended in late 1991. A later improvement will occur in 1995 with the completion of the outfall and the first phase of plant construction.

Because federal and state cost-sharing will contribute only a small percentage of the total costs, most of the costs of the Boston Harbor cleanup will be borne by the ratepayers, who have seen their average water and sewer bills rise by almost 300 percent since 1985. Further large increases are expected to be levied in succeeding years. Given these projected rates and the constraints of borrowing money in the capital markets, Levy and Connor repeatedly emphasize that the MWRA will need to carefully weigh the expected benefits of various aspects of the cleanup program to give the highest priority to investments that yield the greatest water quality improvements.

Finally, Shaun O'Connell, in his reflective and gracefully written essay on New York, captures the contradictions and promises of the American dream: the city as the metaphorical symbol of what has gone wrong in America and how our unwillingness to acknowledge our failure to address the humongous challenges that failure represents diminishes us and our civic culture. O'Connell observes,

We know that our cities have arrived at the point of the maximum diffusion of power and fragmentation of culture, a dissolving center of centrifugal forces that results in chaos and entropy. There, indeed, is where the issues and seemingly irresolvable problems of civilization are focused; there, too, are acted out the dramas of a fully differentiated and self-conscious society now in disarray and decay.

And thus to why the men-who-would-be-president abandoned the cities: "The white middle class has fled the cities for the rings of surrounding suburban towns: there an affluent population increasingly defines the national political agenda."

"The United States is a nation of suburbs," declares William Schneider in *The Atlantic Monthly*. "If the suburbs, which hold the majority of voters, have come to represent the center of what it means to be an American," O'Connell tells us, "then the cities, along with their poor and minority citizens who vote in decreasing numbers, have become marginalized and minimalized in the American mind."

"The hatred of cities is the fear of freedom," writes Lewis H. Lapham, editor of *Harper's Magazine*. "The fear is contagious, and as larger numbers of people come to perceive the city as a barren waste, the more profitable their disillusion becomes to dealers in guns and to political factions that would destroy not only New York and Chicago but also the idea of the city."

And with the death of the *idea* of the city we will lose an integral part of our identity, of our conceptions of self and of self and society.

But who is listening?

America and its communities are changing with unsettling rapidity. Much of this change has been healthy and many of the problems it has caused tend to evoke their own solutions. This country — despite its transitional strains and its freely voiced complaints — has an immense capacity for self-correction.

But for an increasing number of the people living in American cities change has meant deterioration, continued unemployment, and growing alienation from

the rest of society. No process of self-correction promises to rebuild our cities and reunite our urban population; our present problems promise only to become worse.

We believe that some problems of American cities are of such transcending importance as to command an urgent response on a national scale. We also believe that the next five years must be used to develop the capacity to alter present trends of urban development. For we are building toward a confrontation between Negro and white, between the mainstream and the disaffected, and between the affluent and the poor — a confrontation whose symptoms already are apparent in the sporadic and ominous violence which flares up across the Nation in our urban centers both large and small.

We foresee a time when this militancy will engage a larger share of central city populations. Their demands for employment opportunities, compensatory education, and other services are increasing, while the economy of the city and its ability to respond are in decline.

Only the President of the United States can lead the national effort which is required to change this pattern. And, he will need strong and committed allies and new and flexible instruments of policy. We are convinced that the President must forge a grand national coalition to direct the Nation's resources at its city problems.

Thus, the Task Force believes that the first priorities for public action in urban America are related to the growing disparity between city and suburb — a disparity which is expressed in the segregation between white and Negro, the gap between income in central city and in suburb, and the uneven economic growth in metropolitan areas.

*(These paragraphs, written by the late Dr. Paul Ylvisaker, chairman of President Lyndon Johnson's 1967 Task Force on the Cities, appear in the introduction to the task force report.)*

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