

Conspiracy, Exile, & Resistance: Planning & Narrative in Chelsea, Massachusetts

by

Jean A. Riesman  
BA English  
Harvard College, 1980

MCP  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1990

SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF URBAN STUDIES & PLANNING  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN URBAN STUDIES & PLANNING  
AT THE  
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

JUNE 2002

© Jean A. Riesman. All rights reserved.

The author hereby grants to MIT permission to reproduce and  
to distribute publicly paper and electronic copies of this dissertation document  
in whole or in part.

Signature of Author: \_\_\_\_\_

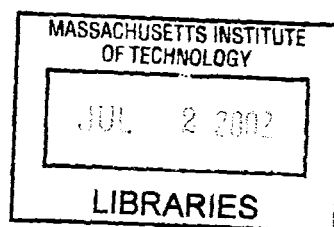
Department of Urban Studies & Planning  
May 29, 2002

Certified by: \_\_\_\_\_

Langley C. Keyes  
Ford Professor of City and Regional Planning  
Dissertation Supervisor

Accepted by: \_\_\_\_\_

Alice Amsden  
Professor of Political Economy  
Chair, PhD Program



ARCHIVES



Conspiracy, Exile, & Resistance:  
Planning & Narrative in Chelsea, Massachusetts

by

Jean A. Riesman

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies & Planning  
on May 28, 2002 in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in  
Urban Studies & Planning

ABSTRACT

In contemporary American cities, urban planners ordinarily work amid conflict in complex institutional environments alive with rival interests, distinct identities, disparate resources, and competing claims. For planners who have responsibility for crafting a consensus out of participatory processes, interpreting these discrete voices is a critical professional task. Accurate interpretation, however, is an enormous challenge, particularly under the joint pressures of time and controversy. This dissertation identifies a methodology for examining variant strands of narrative encountered in zones of conflict and for using narrative details to inspect participants' institutional analyses of the precipitating crisis and its proposed resolution.

The proposed interpretative method directs attention to narrators' figurative language for a series of interpretive cues found in the rhetorical patterns collectively known as tropes, hypothesizing that three specific tropes reflect the institutional dimensions of the conflict at hand:

- ◆ the trope of conspiracy (causality and motive),
- ◆ the trope of exile (invisibility and exclusion), and
- ◆ the trope of resistance (authority and defiance).

The three tropes correspond to aspects of power relationships: the concerted and motivated use of power, degrees of alienation from power, and the consequent answer to power. For the planner, these tropes serve as heuristic

devices for institutional analysis embedded in the language of participants' narration.

The dissertation's case study examined a city in state-imposed municipal receivership in Chelsea, Massachusetts, from 1991 to 1995. A small city in post-industrial decline and with a history of mismanagement and corruption, Chelsea also was in demographic transition from a predominantly white to a majority Latino population. The case focuses specifically on charter reform, initiated by state-appointed receiver Lewis H. Spence as an exercise in social-capital formation. The charter-drafting process provided an opportunity to observe narrative scenario-building and the operation of the identified tropes in a self-consciously constitutional moment, as Chelsea's constituencies struggled to set the terms for democratic governance and cultural co-existence through new political institutions.

Thesis Supervisor: Langley C. Keyes

Title: Ford Professor of City and Regional Planning



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

*Abstract*

*Acknowledgements*

*Dedication*

I. Introduction: Stories & Action.....	11
II. Background.....	47
III. Case History.....	121
IV. Literature Review: Planning & Narrative.....	205
V. Theoretical Contribution.....	253
VI. Case Analysis.....	287
VII. Conclusion.....	381

*Bibliography*

*List of Figures*

2.1 Theories of Responsibility: Building an Institutional Analysis.....	87
4.1 Tensions in the Narrative Process.....	242
5.1 Causal Factors: Macro & Micro.....	261
5.2 Correspondences.....	264
5.3 Schematic Diagram: One Interpretive Cycle Through the Tropes.....	267
5.4 Shades of Conspiracy.....	271
5.5 Facets of Exile.....	279
5.6 States of Resistance.....	283
6.1 Theories of Responsibility: Spence & Carlin.....	311
6.2 Theories of Responsibility: Portnoy & Jordan.....	351
6.3 Theories of Responsibility: Marta Rosa.....	369
6.4 Comparing Maps: Rosa, Portnoy, & Jordan.....	373
6.5 Comparing Maps: Spence & Vote No.....	377

## APPENDICES

### *Appendix A*

Rules of the Game: Charter Reform, City Managers, & Municipal Receivership

### *Appendix B*

The Impossible Brilliance of Metaphor: A Brief History

### *Appendix C*

Notes on Categorization

### *Appendix D*

Social Capital and the Chelsea Case

### *Appendix E*

Excerpt from an Interview

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although much of the work is solitary, it takes a guerrilla-theater troupe to produce a completed dissertation. Special thanks to:

- ◆ Langley Keyes, dissertation committee chair and fellow traveler, for near-infinite patience, for being a *mensch*, and for getting me finished.
- ◆ Lois Craig and John DeMonchaux, the two other committee members, for fortitude with late mountainous text, elegance of thought, and economy of language.
- ◆ Gary Hack, for getting me started.
- ◆ Kalyn Culler Cohen, chair of my shadow committee and collaborative thinker *extraordinaire*, for shepherding me through the middle years of drought and doubt.
- ◆ Juan Vega at Chelsea's Commission on Hispanic Affairs for his insight and candor with a newcomer.
- ◆ Bob Luongo and Martha Bailey in the Community Development office in the basement of Chelsea City Hall for generosity with their time, reflections, and humor.
- ◆ My comrades at PeaceWatch Ireland for tolerating my perpetual lame excuse that I had to go do my homework.
- ◆ La Tonya Green, colleague and friend, for the commitment to critical analysis and to naming names.
- ◆ Vishaan Chakrabarti and Tom Campanella for daily practice in rhetoric and argumentation just when I thought I had figured it all out.
- ◆ Gerard and Brenda McGovern for sharing their porch, their daughter, and their capacious hearts; and to Risa McGovern – see "lame excuse," above.
- ◆ Mark Salza for threatening to take back the bookcases he built if I ever went to graduate school, but moving in instead.
- ◆ My parents for safe harbor at many points in the tempest.
- ◆ And a shout-out to all my students in Paterson, New Jersey. The next graduations are yours.



*Dedicated to the memory of*

Joe & Sadie Riesman  
Chelsea High School, 1915 & 1916

*and*

Matty & Ruth (Riesman) Titiev

*who never forgot where they came from*



# I. INTRODUCTION: STORIES & ACTION

## *Introduction: Planning & Narrative*

In contemporary American cities, urban planners ordinarily work in amid conflict in complex environments where multiple stakeholders have rival economic and political interests as well as distinct racial, ethnic, and cultural identities. These differences are reflected in their disparate institutional positions and expressed in their discrete voices, referring to divergent histories and making competing claims in what often become persistent and passionate controversies. For practitioners who have responsibility for crafting a plan of action out of the participatory processes that accompany most formalized public planning activities, interpreting participants' voices is a critical professional task, central to creating the conditions for both an equitable and a sustainable outcome (Forester 1989, 1993, 1999; Throgmorton 1993, 1996, 2000; Healey 1992, 1997; Innes 1995, 1998, 2000; Mandelbaum *et al.* 1996). Accurate interpretation, however, is an enormous challenge, particularly under the joint pressures of time and conflict. As Forester has noted, "what seems basic to human nature, 'just listening,' is really quite complex moral and political work" (1999:109). What are the analytic tools with which planners can respond to that complexity? What should planners be listening to, and what should they be listening for?

A critical and substantial strain in the recent planning literature puts such questions at "the leading edge of planning theory" (Fainstein 2000:451) and suggests that narrative is an important but under-utilized data source for

planners. Planning theorists and practitioners increasingly have come to see planning as a form of "communicative action" (Habermas 1975) whose practice is "rhetorical" (Throgmorton 2000), "interactive" (Innes 1995), and "deliberative" (Forester 1999) in nature, redoubling emphasis on the crucial role of information and its distribution in planning processes. In addition, on the principle "that stories shape action as much as action shapes stories," (Rosaldo, quoted in Mattingly 1989:12), communicative planning practice recognizes narrative and not merely technical knowledge as valid, relevant, highly influential, and even indispensable in the planning process (Healey 1992, 1996; Innes 1995, 1998; Forester 1993, 1999; Mandelbaum *et al.* 1996).

At the same time, however, postmodern epistemology has rendered information itself ever more problematic: no longer objective in origin or character but intimately tied to institutions in its production and transmission as well as in its significance and influence (Innes 1998, Harper & Stein in Mandelbaum *et al.* 1996). Questions of narrative integrity have spread from fiction to historiography – that is, to the reliability of accounts of events in the public domain (White 1981, 1987). Not only reliability but intelligibility is in question: planning theorists are compelled to address fundamental doubts that communities can overcome the "incommensurability premise" that threatens to make "their stories, their discourses, and their language" mutually unintelligible (Harper & Stein in Mandelbaum *et al.* 1996:415). Nonetheless, narrative as a mode of representation and inquiry has moved from the periphery and into the mainstream of the "hermeneutic practical tradition" (Ferraro in Mandelbaum *et al.* 1996:321) of knowledge in professional action. From a methodological perspective, narrative is simultaneously a more urgent



medium in planning practice, a less reliable source in any one voice, and more challenging in its interpretive demands.

Narrative indeed is a rich and intricate vein for planners to explore. Participatory planning processes are immersed in what anthropologist Victor Turner called "social drama," the public performance of conflict and its resolution either in renewed institutional unity or in new forms of institutional division (1974:33; also in Mitchell, ed., 1981:145). In the midst of conflict and as part of its enactment, participants (including planners) construct narratives about its origins and meaning, grounded in historical reference points and prior conflicts that develop new linkage forward into the present. They also assemble running accounts of the current crisis and any efforts at intervention as well as the participation process itself. Told from narrators' personal and institutional perspectives, these narratives vary and often are mutually contradictory. Moreover, as narrative theory has warned, interpreting those narratives is not self-evident. Far from being a transparent or neutral record of events, each of these narratives – and all of their narrators – are by definition unreliable. From a rhetorical perspective, historiographic narratives are "propositional" in nature: highly selective accounts which are a vehicle of "contestation" in the political arena over those events' truest rendering, with "the weight of their meaning...thrown forward" onto propositions about its implications for the future (White in Mitchell, ed., 1981:15; citing Kermode on 21).

Although planners must include themselves in this epistemic unreliability, in practice they also must exert judgment over what they believe to be verifiable facts while responding to participants' (and observers') sometimes

incompatible constructions of the same circumstances and thus apparently irreconcilable calls for remedy. Amid these paradoxes of narrative being at once vitally useful, philosophically problematic, and locally contradictory, methods for analysis of narrative data have not yet been well-established for the planning field. Planners still need a coherent and robust strategy for accurate interpretation in the multi-vocal, multi-institutional context in which they conduct their practice.

Proposing an approach to institutional analysis through narrative, this dissertation identifies critical elements in such a strategy: a two-part methodology for analysis of the variant strands of participants' narratives encountered in zones of conflict. Its hypothesis is that narrative construction in the planning process is an ongoing cycle of input and interpretation structured by:

- ◆ an iterative process of gathering, building, and revising a historical narrative that interacts dynamically with the institutional context, and
- ◆ a pattern in the narrator's figurative language – borrowing a term from narrative theory, a consistent set of tropes – reflecting and shaping this interpretive process of analysis and synthesis.

Both the narrative story-line – the events selected and assembled as the plot – and the meaning illuminated by the appearance of the tropes can be treated as data. These data serve to broaden planners' base of historical and institutional knowledge as well as to identify areas of ambiguity, inconsistency, and disparity over the sequence and substance of prior action – areas which then require further testing and clarification to narrow down sectors of actual

disagreement. The data also offer ways to deepen planners' understanding of participants' positions as well as to refine their own reading of the institutional map, so that practitioners can better exercise "astutely alert pragmatism" amid "precarious and vulnerable" participation processes (Forester 1999:20, 7).

### *Narrative Analysis in the Public Domain*

Narrative has become a ubiquitous topic over the past several decades, with a remarkable inventory across a range of academic disciplines and cultural venues. Even a journalist's recent essay pronounced food labels to be a form of autobiography, not just a list of ingredients and disclaimers but an implicit narrative:

Whenever I go to the supermarket these days, I collect labels. No, I'm not saving up box tops in order to get a decoder ring from Battle Creek. The sort of labels I collect now promise something else, a slightly different decoding. Each of them tells me a little story about where the food I'm buying comes from and how it has been produced...Food that comes with a story – whether it's organic, fairly traded, humanely grown, [or] sustainably caught...– represents a not-so-implicit challenge to every other product in the supermarket that dares not narrate its path from farm to table...These are stories about what used to be called "the means of production," and in a food system as troubled and opaque as ours, they can be radical indeed.<sup>1</sup>

If the print on a label bears the full weight of the means of production, and the absence of detail on a "product...that does not *narrate* its path from farm to table" can be imputed to be a positive act of withholding data in order to shape a public narrative by omission, then an explicit tale in the midst of an

---

<sup>1</sup> Michael Pollan, "Produce Politics," *New York Times Magazine*, January 13, 2001, pp. 12-3, emphasis added.

explicit conflict must be an abundant deposit for further exploration.

At the same time, narrative itself has become, in one author's gloss on Kenneth Burke, "the Trouble" (Bruner 1990:50-1).<sup>2</sup> Narrators themselves have become categorically unreliable – discredited not only in the first person, where self-interest or institutional interest most obviously might surface, but in the third person as well, a voice that has become perhaps the most suspect of all since the epistemological "dethroning [of] the omniscient narrator who knew the world 'as it was,' and about what his protagonists were making of it" (Bruner 1990:51).<sup>3</sup> Fiction got there first:

By getting rid of him, the modern novel has sharpened contemporary sensibilities to the conflict inherent in two people trying to know the "outer" world from different perspectives...[T]he Trouble that drives literary narrative has become...more epistemic, more caught up in the clash of alternative meanings, less involved in the settled realities of a landscape of action. And perhaps this is true of mundane narrative as well (Bruner 1990:51-2).

As he suspected, identical "Trouble" roils "mundane" narrative as well – that is, narrative in and of the world normally accepted as being "outer" and non-fictional, the world of public policy, planning proposals, public meetings, and journalism, as well as the network of institutional relationships and histories in which the resulting conflicts are embedded.

---

<sup>2</sup> In Burke's definition of drama, "[w]ell-formed stories...are composed of a pentad of an Actor, an Action, a Goal, a Scene, and an Instrument – plus Trouble." Bruner has made the story itself the Trouble.

<sup>3</sup> Unreliable narrators have been on the front lines of modern literature at least since Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*, perhaps the most notorious being Humbert Humbert in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*. The unhelpful narrator, who leaves the reader in the same state of unresolved puzzlement as the main character, is a more recent tradition, whose master is Thomas Pynchon (see especially *The Crying of Lot 49*).

In fact, the problem – and the complex solution – of "mundane" narrative has long come to dwell to the public domain, as captured by Neustadt and May's often-cited advice to those who traffic in policy analysis: "Don't ask, 'What's the problem?' Ask, 'What's the story?' – That way you'll find out what the problem really is."<sup>4</sup> Public-policy analysts have been both advised and cautioned,

Sometimes what we are left to deal with are not the facts – that is why there is a controversy – but the different stories people tell as a way of articulating and making sense of the uncertainties and complexities that matter to them...[I]n some controversies, our tool kit of microeconomics, research methods, law, organization theory, and public[-]management practice ceases to be of any real help. Controversies...push us to the limits of our competence...[U]nless you are able – not just willing, but able – to treat seriously people's stories about those situations where facts and values are in dispute, you are not taking the situations seriously. Contemporary literary theory, especially the analysis of narrative, turns out to be one serious and particularly potent way to treat complex policies (Roe 1994: ix-x).

At first glance, it may seem a mystery what sustenance literary theory offers policy analysis or planning practice; contributions from the province of fiction might appear to have dubious relevance to the brutality of "real-world" conflict or a planner's immediate responsibility within that brutal vortex. But there are both theoretical and practical links between the two realms. The conventions of narrative, as well as the constraints on narrative, pertain in fiction and non-fiction alike; "the historian's 'empirical' account and the novelist's imaginative story *share* the same narrative form" (Bruner 1990:45, emphasis in the original), subject to similar analytic techniques and critique.<sup>5</sup> Thus the same challenges force policy-makers and practitioners to

---

<sup>4</sup> Richard Neustadt and Ernst May, *Thinking in Time*, New York: Press, 1986; quoted in Forester (1999:19).

<sup>5</sup> He adds, "May that not be why dictators take such draconian measures against a country's

account for their own points of view and institutional frames of reference, not only in the retrospect of planning history but also in daily practice (Fischer and Forester 1993). The bland, detached, and authoritative voice of planning reports is as susceptible to decoding as a food label in a supermarket. New demands confront the profession: to break the code that permits "the construction of a regime of fact" that seems to stand apart from interpretation, a reminder to planners that "the plain style is not a distortion-free mirror of nature, that chronicles are also interpretations and that vital meanings reside in patterns and intentions. Invested in the regime of fact, we [as planners] may suppress alternative interpretations and meanings..." (Mandelbaum 1991:211). Or, invested in the regime of interpretation, planners may help expose the full range of "vital meanings" in those patterns while exerting care in the construction of intentions.

In response to these political and philosophical disruptions, planning theory has turned towards communication as the essential element of a democratic planning process which has both problem-solving and justice as its dual goal. Moving away from earlier positivist models of factual analysis and linear decision-making sequences, the professional agenda of the planner has been transformed:

Gone are the times when planners thought that making choices for others is simply the privilege of those having technical knowledge...All effective planning is...a negotiated process among affected parties who have different values, concerns, and interests at stake...What we imagined as the common good of the *polis* was always contested terrain. The common good cannot be assumed *a priori*, nor can it be determined by research. It is not a given. The public good is a notion of process; it emerges in the course of planning itself, and its concrete meaning is constantly evolving...It is that...which makes it, indeed, the central

---

[dissident] novelists? (1990:55).

process of a democratic polity (Friedmann 1989:129-30).

Advocates of this communication- and process-centered conception of planning practice argue that technical and instrumental rationality have been superseded by "communicative rationality," which "rel[ies] more on qualitative interpretive inquiry than on logical deductive analysis" (Innes 1995:184) or on quantitative measures and instruments based on "scientifically validated knowledge" (Innes 1998:53) alone, without other forms of information. Principles of communicative rationality include a consensus decision-making process based on "social learning" (Habermas 1984), which embraces a broader definition of both information and legitimate participation as part of assembling a more accurate and more just threshold for planning decisions (Friedmann 1987, 1989; Innes 1995, 1998; Harper & Stein in Mandelbaum *et al.* 1996, Forester 1989, 1993, 1999; Healey 1992, 1997). This change in the status and nature of qualitative knowledge brings complexity and contentiousness with it. Planners may well be confronted by participants' accounts – however contradictory – of the underlying history, of the immediate institutional context, and of the present unfolding of events. In the wide horizontal landscape these authors paint of professional practice, planners have an affirmative obligation to interpret these data, manage the conflicts that arise from them, and make the process not only interactive and deliberative but productive.

Forester's comment about the hard work of listening may be normative, but it has methodological consequences. He offers as an illustration the ordinary query among planners, "What happened at the meeting last night?" – noting that "the answers to that question set agendas, shape senses of relevance,

contribute to priority[-]setting, construct problems, and shape action" (1999:45). The response to that question, however, depends on the meeting-goer's interpretation and emphasis, and the questioner's criteria for what merits reportage make the question itself almost an entirely different inquiry: the difference between "what happened?" (that is, a simple description of who showed up, who spoke, how the crowd responded to various planning propositions) and a more urgent "what *happened?*" – that is, a more complex description of who dominated and who got challenged; what historical reference points were invoked and what new twist was revealed; what alliances were apparent, reinforced, built, or strained; whose credibility was ratified or weakened; and most critically, how the political space for the planning exercise at hand was affected. Even the most routine summaries are latent with this kind of data. Nonetheless, for those who might want to be more deliberate about accessing it, the planning literature thus far offers few specific methodological suggestions on gathering and interpreting what planners can learn from such data.

The approach to narrative analysis that will be offered here is meant to draw attention to these narrative data – data ever-present, or present just below the surface of narrative. It highlights and examines not just the highly visible and dramatic points of decision and conflict but the ongoing formation of the connective tissue that holds together a particular narrative from a particular point of view. The incremental, continual, and cumulative nature of "the work of attention" has been captured elegantly by author Iris Murdoch:

[I]f we consider what the work of attention is like, how continuously it goes on, and how imperceptibly it builds up structures of value round about us, we shall not be surprised that at crucial moments of choice most of the business of



choosing is already over. This does not imply that we are not free, certainly not. But it implies that the exercise of our freedom is a small piecemeal business which goes on all the time and not a grandiose leaping about unimpeded at important moments. The moral life, in this view, is something that goes on continually, not something that is switched off in between the occurrence of explicit moral choices. What happens in between such choices is indeed what is crucial.<sup>6</sup>

The same is true for the political life, and the political process through which planning is enacted. When various constituencies consider the crucial choices between planning options, or whether to accept any proposal at all, those decisions sit in a continuously evolving personal and institutional context long under construction, a context representing the aggregation of experience in relation to the particular issue at hand and in relation to power itself. Thus, when an individual or a constituency approaches a decision point (for example, whether to oppose or to embrace a particular proposal or process), the resulting stance has not just an immediate but an incremental history which has been accumulating – and which can be interrogated – long before the decision point itself is reached. In this mundane and useful way, narratives carry out the work of attention that Murdoch identified for all "moral actors" and Forester has defined more locally for planners as a series of interpretive action-shaping tasks.

#### ***Proposed Approach to Narrative Analysis***

As noted, this proposed approach to narrative analysis rests on the hypothesis that planners and participants (as well as observers) already are engaged in an iterative process of building and revising a historical narrative which in turn

---

<sup>6</sup> Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Ark, 1970), p. 37, quoted by Forester in Mandelbaum *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

frames that narrator's understanding of current events and response to new information. It also proposes that as part of this narrative activity, consistent patterns in the narratives' figurative language, or tropes, carry vivid interpretive clues to the narrator's ongoing analysis of personal and institutional power in each scenario – again, an existing set of embedded images.

The first step in the proposed interpretive strategy is to focus on narrative scenario-building. Within these scenarios, the differences between plot-lines are one significant source of information: their dissimilarities allow comparative analysis of content – of character, sequence of action, and emphasis – between one participant's chronicle and another, their contrasts providing clues to alternate "theories of responsibility" (Cobb 1994) and institutional analyses. Therefore the proposed method for narrative analysis is characterized first by attention and reflection: holding contradictory plot-lines in suspension, as important data, rather than immediately dismissing those assumed to be less reliable as invalid, irrelevant, inflammatory, or based on false premises.

The second step in the proposed strategy of narrative analysis directs attention to narrators' figurative language for another series of interpretive cues that otherwise might be overlooked as merely ornamental, extravagant, or idiosyncratic. These cues are found in the linguistic patterns collectively known as tropes. Literally "turn" in Greek, trope is the umbrella term for the wide variety of ways in which a word or phrase may be turned from its conventional use to a novel one for rhetorical effect. Metaphor may be the most familiar of these figures of speech, but it is only one in a broad array that

includes simile, personification, metonymy, *etc.* In literary analysis, consistent imagery conveyed through the use of tropes are understood to be powerful indicators of underlying issues which may not have been exposed more directly; evidence accumulates in the figurative rather than the expository language.

The dissertation transfers this interpretive habit to an empirical setting, arguing that each narrator also manifests the institutional analysis of the conflict at hand in three specific sets of figurative images that cluster around the most central dimensions of that analysis:

- ◆ the trope of conspiracy (causality and intent),
- ◆ the trope of exile (status and voice), and
- ◆ the trope of resistance (authority and defiance).

The tropes mark the cycle of participants' (and observers') ongoing efforts to discover and assess intent in the institutional environment, to gauge relative institutional status and the possibility of meaningful participation, and to justify responsive action either in deference to or in defiance of an institutional norm. For the planner, these tropes serve as heuristic devices for institutional analysis embedded in the language of participants' narration.

Participants in (and observers of) planning processes are of necessity pre-occupied with the distribution, exercise, and effect of political power; they also are engaged in institutional analysis of what enforces that power. Power is defined here and throughout the dissertation beyond the Weberian imposition of will, and discretion over when and whether that will is to be

imposed; it also includes the power of focusing institutional attention (Forester 1989), embedding information in institutional action (Innes 1998), and setting the terms of imagined potential outcomes (Healey 1992). The tropes hypothesized in the dissertation's argument correspond to aspects of power relationships in this wider sense: the concerted and motivated use of power, degrees of alienation from power, and the consequent answer to power. Conspiracy surmises both intentional acts of power and hidden links to power, detecting causality and motive; exile identifies hierarchies in the ecology of power and the threat of displacement from its niches by some more forceful power; resistance prompts and justifies a posture toward (or against) countervailing power. Thus the tropes track an ever-evolving provisional answer to the eternal underlying question, "who rules?" and, in the multiple narratives of a planning conflict, to the additional normative question, "who should rule?" (Hunter 1953, Dahl 1961, Banfield and Wilson 1962, Yates 1977, Domhoff 1978, Castells 1983, Mollenkopf 1983, Logan and Molotch 1985, Marcus 1989).

Roughly rather than rigidly sequential, and of a cyclical rather than a linear nature, these three tropes form a constructivistic cycle that connects what is already understood to what is made of new information and analysis.

Meanwhile, the historic backdrop itself is not static, but revised over time by the infill of new information and the shading of historical significance, while ideas, proposals, and political action are filtered, as they occur, through these pre-existing narratives and through the tropes, whose operation affect decision-making and position-taking – thus continually renewing the ongoing cycle of reciprocity between stories and action.

This dissertation does not claim that planning outcomes are determined by narrative alone, that the utility of ideas and well-crafted proposals is negligible, or that other forms of political action are less important than spinning a web of persuasive rhetoric. It suggests, however, that it is a mistake to treat narrative as residual, or to regard it as a worthwhile but low-priority task. The goal is a theoretically grounded approach to practice in which narratives are gathered and mined for qualitative data analyzed with the same methodological gravity accorded quantitative data – as an essential raw material, not as merely supplementary information.

### *Institutions & Institutional Analysis*

This approach to institutional analysis through narrative rests on the assumption that to do their work, planners enter a political space already shaped by the institutional positions of the participants, as well as their own. This political space is the backdrop to the multiple alternative scenarios that participants – including the planner – assemble out of present events and information, and represents the space available for problem-solving given the institutional environment. Each of these scenarios establishes a selective sequence of institutional moves and counter-moves from the conflict's origin through the present unfolding of events; as action continues, scenarios evolve, interpretation emerges, and participants respond with subsequent action, the shape of the political space may shift anew – broadening, narrowing, shifting its configuration to include new domains previously outside the space and to exclude corners that have become dead-ends. Because institutional analysis is at the core of the proposed interpretive method, it is important to establish a clear definition of institutions and an appreciation of

their power.

Institutions are a remarkable human invention: they are both ever-present and ever-absent, organizations which may be housed in physical locations but are enacted only through human activity and concurrence. Thus they also are susceptible to both disbelief and resistance, as well as transformation. They operate in visible and invisible ways: law, bureaucracy, and racism are invisible institutional processes whose outcomes may be quite visible; institutions such as courts, city halls, and classrooms are materially visible, but they rest on invisible assumptions. March and Olsen capture these several dimensions:

Many of the major actors in modern economic and political systems are formal institutions...Bureaucratic agencies, legislative committees, and appellate courts are arenas for contending social forces, but they are also collections of standard operating procedures and structures that define and defend values, norms, interests, identities, and beliefs (1989:1-2, 16-17).

From these "standard operating procedures" and "norms" are derived "the game" as well as the rules – articulated or tacit, formal and informal – by which that game is played:

An institution is a set of working rules governing transactions among individuals. An institution is effective for a particular "community" – a set of individuals whose behavior falls under the jurisdiction of the institution...– and for a particular set of interdependencies among the citizens of that community...[T]he institutional rules then specify certain rights, exposures to the rights of others, privileges, and responsibilities of the members of the community. An institution establishes, in other words, the rules by which decisions are made, bargains are struck, claims are granted legitimacy and adjudicated, sanctions are applied, and resources are managed and distributed (Throgmorton and Fisher 1993:119).

What makes an institution "effective" may be problematic in terms of the claims and constituencies it defines as outside its parameters. If institutional advantage is established and protected for one "community," an advantage which is its implicit or explicit purpose, questions may arise about the threshold for other legitimate claims or counter-claims.<sup>7</sup> Planning conflicts often occur at this busy institutional juncture, and may in fact be defined by these competing claims to legitimacy as well as disputes over the distribution or management of resources.

Because institutions find expression not only in easily-identified bureaucratic organizational charts and regulatory regimes but also in the more elusive flow-charts of cultural practice, March & Olsen also noted the critical importance of "the design of political institutions" (1989:17). The transparency of that design is a matter of perspective. As a set of values, habits, and enforcement mechanisms, an institution may be a virtually transparent medium from the perspective of the insider, yet simultaneously opaque and inaccessible from the point of view of the outsider – in both cases, a highly-engineered structure. Assessment of the relative fragility or tenacity of an institution also may be in the eye of the beholder. While acknowledging their "dominant role" (1989:2), March and Olsen also characterize institutions as "islands of imperfect and temporary organization in potentially inchoate political worlds," observing that "the coherence of institutions varies but is sometimes substantial enough to justify viewing a collectivity as acting

---

<sup>7</sup> Throgmorton and Fisher's definition of an institutional community is susceptible to tautology: "Some sort of community is a prerequisite to establishing an institution...But the institution itself helps to define and perpetuate the community. Thus through the establishment and reform of institutions, a community decides what kind of community it is to become" (1993:120). This simplistic depiction of institutional lifecycles, imperatives, and barriers to change also skirts the complexities of community decision-making.

coherently" (1989:18). Yet what they endow with such tentativeness often appears so embedded, all-encompassing, and self-reinforcing that it is experienced and referenced as "the system."<sup>8</sup>

Although hardly neutral nor without their own institutional affiliations and biases, planners often stand at the threshold between these multiple dimensions: the visible and the invisible, the material and the conceptual, the opaque and the transparent, the inside and the outside. Forester (1987, 1989, 1993, 1999), Innes (1995, 1998), and Healey (1992, 1997) have closely observed planners in that intermediate stance, and have explored their instrumental and ethical responsibilities to serve as translators and guides, as investigators and honest brokers, and as creators of new institutions with greater transparency. Marris has a less sanguine view of planners as "intellectual mediators," calling out the contradictions and crises of legitimacy that arise for practitioners on the interpretative edge between the authoritative and the autonomous:

Their professional status within the institutional structure of society depends on what their constant search for solutions to the problems created by these disparities contributes to rationalizing and legitimating social relationships. They are valuable to the authoritative order of society because they help to articulate the practical and ideological adaptation which may be needed to maintain the basis of political consent. At the same time, they enjoy more ideological autonomy than most professionals, because without it they cannot discuss these critical issues of legitimacy. The difficulties of legitimating and rationalizing policies at first provoke new kinds of mediation and then undermine them as the ambiguities of these mediating roles become unmanageable (1982:4-5).

---

<sup>8</sup> Low-functioning institutions with "captive" communities may be simultaneously incoherent, self-reinforcing, and resistant to reform or re-definition by the community it is said to serve, thereby perpetuating systemic incoherence as well as captivity.



From either perspective, planners may be in a position to "read" critically across institutions, making the development of their interpretive skills all the more crucial.

Among the institutional resources that planners may broker, one is particularly crucial: "Regardless of the way in which institutions are structured, attention is a scarce good in politics; and control over the allocation of attention is important to a political actor" (March & Olsen 1989:27). Forester, Innes, and Healey all stress the mediative power of planners in shaping attention and agendas as one of their most important professional responsibilities, either limiting or expanding the opportunities for "public dispute processes [to] reconstitute political spaces" (Forester 1999:177).

Drawing from Habermas' theory of communicative action, the literature on communicative planning theory and practice is highly attuned to the dynamics between language and institutional action, "enabling us," in Forester's concise summary,

to study meaningful action as it is systematically staged and structured. In the staging of communicative action, we are confronted with the causal influences of institutional context and history. In the enactment and utterances of communicative action, we are confronted with the actors' own theorizing, interpretations, articulations of self and other. Thus in the study of organizations, for example, we can assess not only the meaningful and carefully contextuated character of members' actions, but the institutionally resisting or maintaining character of those actions as well. Likewise, in the study of planners' or policy analysts' work,...we can study the situated, performative qualities of their conversations and texts and realize how far broader institutional and structural questions of power, class, culture, ethnicity, and control manifest themselves in daily speech, writing, and gesture (1993:2).

Narrative analysis puts under close inspection the crafting of stories as part of "meaningful action as it is systematically staged and structured," and alerts planners (as well as other participants and witnesses) to the impact of the crafting process, to "the situated, performative qualities of...conversations and texts" and how institutional relationships "manifest themselves in daily speech, writing, and gesture." In narrative are embedded the narrator's hypotheses about "the causal influences of institutional context and history" on the matter at hand, and about "the institutionally resisting or maintaining character" of a given set of actions, as well as the narrator's "own articulations of self and other" within that institutional surround. In this "performative" environment where "meaningful action" is "staged" and "questions of power, class, culture, ethnicity, and control manifest themselves in daily speech, writing, and gesture," it is even more critical for planners to have analytic tools for the interpretation of language and narrative.

#### *Public Participation Processes & Scenario-Building*

Nowhere is the contest of competing narratives more obvious or more obdurate than in the assorted forums of citizen participation that have become the standard institutional apparatus for public input into decision-making – an example of which will be the primary focus of the dissertation's case study. Over the past several decades, planning practice and public regulatory procedure have incorporated a series of methods for community participation in planning decisions, institutional mechanisms through which are given an opportunity to shape or at least enter formal challenges to proposed action. These participatory processes themselves are the result of a

prior generation of challenges to technical rationality and its institutionalized authority, which buckled under the combined pressures of the anti-war, civil-rights, and environmental movements. Demands for greater public accountability of planning agencies and for more citizen access to decision-making resulted in the institutionalization of a series of participation processes. While these opportunities for public review and input provided more "sunshine" and formal access to the decision-making process, they also have been subject to fierce critique as ineffective rituals and even as barriers to effective implementation of public programs: from a narrative perspective, whether there is any meaningful possibility for citizens to change the ending of the story presented by the planners.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the regulatory rhythm of public-comment periods, citizen advisory committees, and periodic escalation into legal action, a spectrum of alternative dispute-resolution techniques has emerged, operating along less majoritarian lines and moving toward a consensus-building model. Proponents of communicative planning practice share with theorists in the mediation literature a changing definition of citizen participation, no longer defined as the simple act of holding a public hearing but as a more demanding process:

From this perspective, "participation" is not coterminous to the "telling" of a story (if it were, turn-taking would be all that is required to insure participation)...[Participation] refers not only to the speaker's telling of a story which positions self as legitimate but also the elaboration of that story by

---

<sup>9</sup> Arnstein's "eight-step ladder" (1969) of citizen participation escalates from "non-participation" to "tokenism" to "citizen power" at the top of the ladder, which represents institutional strategies for participation ranging from the raw manipulation of public involvement to outright citizen control. Her skeptical view is that it is rare for citizens not to get stuck on lower steps of participation with little or no transfer of "citizen power."

others. Thus...[it] is fundamentally an interactive phenomenon that cannot be reduced to the speech acts by one person (1993:250).

In this expanded conceptual forum, participants bring not only divergent interests but warring perspectives and disharmonic histories to the table, with narrative as an expression of other forms of conflict (and perhaps, in the hands of a skilled mediator, as a medium for conflict resolution) and as an interpretive frame for the current dispute. Participatory processes – whatever their democratic merits as expressions of inclusiveness and multiplicity, or their democratic demerits as mere shadow-plays of public sentiment and influence – demonstrate in a particularly visible way participants' constant cycles of scenario-building. Thus an exercise in public deliberation (such as the Chelsea charter-drafting process) is a rich environment in which to observe these cycles (and on which to test the proposed method of narrative analysis.)

*What about Transparency, Inclusiveness, & Cooperation?*

While proposed in the spirit of calling things by their right names, the three tropes as hypothesized may appear gratuitously negative in character, as though assuming that in the planning domain, the default settings were paranoia, victimization, and deliberate non-cooperation. Better, the reader might contend, to reverse the tropes and identify them by their nobler antonyms: transparency, inclusivity, and cooperation, whose enactment and interaction presumably would lead more directly to collaborative problem-solving. However, these antonymic qualities are honored far more in the breach than in the observance, and the three tropes identified above are intended to be practical guides to the normal traffic of human perception in

the midst of political conflict. Moreover, in a situation where transparency, inclusivity, and cooperation already exist in some measure, there is a less urgent need for topological analysis to survey the terrain of conflict. The definitional issues are addressed in more detail in Chapter V.<sup>10</sup>

*Social Capital in a Narrative Context:  
A Note of Theoretical Caution*

Any discussion of public participation, alternative dispute resolution, and "social drama" would not have to go far to stumble into the social-capital debate. "Social capital" has become a popular and tricky subject over the past decade, and the phrase has been employed in a wide variety of ambiguous ways. Putnam's 1993 book *Making Democracy Work*, a longitudinal sociological study of political cultures and democratic practice in Italy, inserted the term into academic debate, "refer[ring] to features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions."<sup>11</sup> Now ever-present across many fields of social analysis (but still relatively fresh at the time of the receivership), social capital operates as a metaphor for the intangible qualities of reciprocity and trust that sustain – or, by their absence, drain – communal life.

The nature, source, and function of social capital have been the subject of intense debate since Putnam's turn-of-phrase, simultaneously brilliant and elusive, joined the lexicon of social and political analysis. The most recent

---

<sup>10</sup> For further insights into categorization, see Stone 1988:308, also cited in Appendix C.

<sup>11</sup> Noting that "the term social capital itself turns out to have been invented at least six times over the twentieth century," Putnam in his book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* quite honorably traces the use of the phrase back to 1916 (2000:19).

term in the series of analogies that have been built on the "capital" base, it is abstract but highly imaginable as some fundamental unit of social exchange. Whereas money underpins the flows of financial capital, raw influence is the stuff of political capital, and realized individual talent constitutes human capital, the "currency" of social capital is identified by Putnam as the element of trust:

Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that would not be attainable in its absence...For example, a group whose members manifest trustworthiness and place extensive trust in one another will be able to accomplish much more than a comparable group lacking that trustworthiness and trust (Putnam 1993:157).

Trust is the coin of the realm, to be deposited, exchanged, or invested. By logical extension, its inverse, mistrust, is a sign of depletion of the account, an outward flow which unchecked could lead to outright bankruptcy. Parallels to Chelsea's fiscal and political deficits make the impulse to apply Putnam's language to the city's receivership experience almost irresistible.

The temptation is strong because, on first exposure, the social-capital metaphor has an intuitive, almost Emersonian sense of "rightness," the naming of a quality so obvious that it is hard to imagine that it ever went unnamed. It seems to capture a missing fragment – the complex interaction of human feeling and political institutions – in social theory, and assuages a nagging sense that existing academic language has been inadequate to the task of representing the layers of personal and political relationships: too mechanistic and certain in its claims to objective description and measurement, too clumsy to capture the "softer" side of a hard-edged analysis of interests and strategies. The popularity of the social-capital imagery (and,

simultaneously, its imprecision) marks the presence and importance of multiple dimensions of human experience sometimes absented in the calculus of community power, and the appeal of a social-science term that gestures at those dimensions.

Aside from its current ubiquity in the literature of policy and practice, the social-capital metaphor has a specific relevance to narrative analysis according to the three prototypical tropes that this dissertation proposes. By highlighting trust as the most fundamental component of social capital, Putnam's construct highlights the obverse qualities of distrust: the specific interplay of suspicion and alienation as forces in the unstable environment of a political process that easily may turn oppositional. Moreover, by emphasizing the power of the ties that trust creates, the social-capital metaphor also recognizes the strength of relationships and not just the cold pluralistic analysis of interests in the midst of a public controversy. As a perceptual lens through which action is analyzed and the dimensions of trust (or mistrust) are estimated, it therefore offers an unanticipated support for the tropes, which trace a cycle of mistrust and exclusion driving a given constituency to a position of resistance – or, if the cycle can be interrupted, to a position of greater cooperation. In return, the tropes offer a set of thematic categories through which the ebb and flow of social capital's components – trust, ties, and networks – can be detected through the narrative process.

The research for this dissertation was not directed at social capital, and therefore the data do not permit a direct quantitative or qualitative before-and-after assessment of social-capital gains or losses through the charter-drafting process in Chelsea or as a result of the receivership experience as a

whole. But the three identified tropes may have some unanticipated utility for a further inquiry into the assessment of social-capital formation (or deterioration) amid conflict, because of their focus on qualities or conditions that might be considered proxies for the accumulation or depletion of social capital. By virtue of their inverse relationship to transparency, inclusivity, and cooperation, the appearance of the tropes in the language of participants may permit some rough metric for the relative presence or absence of social capital. To establish that relationship definitively, however, is another quest, not undertaken here.



## INTRODUCTION OF THE CASE MATERIAL

To ground these propositions about the instrumental use of narrative analysis in planning practice, the dissertation presents a case study of state-imposed municipal receivership in Chelsea, Massachusetts, from 1991 to 1995. A small city on Boston Harbor with a history of mismanagement and corruption, Chelsea was in post-industrial decline and demographic transition before state takeover, moving from a predominantly white to a majority Latino population. The case focuses specifically on charter reform through a public process initiated by state-appointed receiver Lewis H. Spence. Within the institutional frame of municipal receivership, charter reform provided an opportunity to examine the narrative contest and the operation of the identified tropes in through the elaborate and sometimes bitter charter-drafting exercise, as Chelsea's constituencies struggled over setting the terms for democratic governance and cultural co-existence through new political institutions.

Chelsea offers an opportunity to examine narrative construction and narrative conflict in the midst of a complex urban intervention. Municipal receivership in Chelsea was a four-year experiment in an array of planning and urban-management strategies: fiscal stabilization and tax-base expansion, rezoning and physical redevelopment, reorganization of city government and re-casting political participation to include previously disenfranchised residents, both white and non-white. The case study concentrates on the charter-reform process as a sustained public conversation about Chelsea's collective past and future: a performance within the city's "social drama"

permitting a close reading of the narrative logic at work in that dialogue. The case material is drawn from direct observations of public meetings as well as interviews and other documentary research sources including local newspaper and community cable television archives. Observation-based research closely followed the course of the charter-reform process through the drafting of the charter between January and June 1994, the charter referendum in June 1994, the first City Council and School Committee elections under the terms of the new charter in December 1994, and the hiring of the first city manager in July 1995.

As a democratic interruption, state-imposed receivership in Chelsea was a traumatic event bringing fresh attention to the city's underlying conflicts and public occasions in which to voice them. Not only calling into question the integrity and survival of a two-square-mile political entity, receivership challenged the city's constituencies and the legitimacy of their various claims, thus also summoning up the history surrounding those claims. The city's political recovery – more accurately, the recovery of the city's autonomy through the development of a new city charter, its ratification by referendum, and its implementation – then occurred through a self-conscious (if not universally satisfactory) series of exercises in democratic deliberation and community participation.

The case material demonstrates how multiple constituencies conducted institutional analysis (and expressed the results) through their narratives of Chelsea's descent into receivership and the charter-drafting process itself. It also provides evidence of the consistent appearance of the tropes of conspiracy, exile, and resistance in the language of both proponents and

opponents of the proposed charter. As a particularly salient example, the case analysis highlights the paradox in which two mutually-hostile camps both took positions against the charter based inverse interpretations of the same evidence – interpretations which identified the other as getting inordinate benefits from the charter as written. With such diametrically opposed positions, they could not form a coalition to defeat the charter. [Nonetheless, each group's analysis shared a similar critique of the receiver's role in drafting the charter and lobbying for its passage,... and therefore had strong parallels, in that they signified to each side a hidden scenario of motivated action (conspiracy) and a condition of] powerlessness and exclusion (exile), prompting disengagement from the formal charter-drafting process and public opposition to its product (resistance).

### *Scope*

This dissertation describes conditions leading to the onset of receivership in September 1991 and outlines the city's experience through July 1995, focusing on the charter-drafting process itself as the case study. The scope of the analysis does not include evaluation of the Chelsea receivership, nor of receivership itself as either a planning tool or an urban intervention. The case study focuses tightly on the charter-drafting process and on examining the narrative language and logic expressed by a range of Chelsea "voices" in the midst of that provocative exercise. To the extent that those constituencies made reference to the larger historical environment and the specific course of events during the receivership period, the author has attempted to put those elements in context.

The case study's applicability to other circumstances as a study of receivership itself as an institutional intervention is limited. As an extreme response to a declared social emergency, receivership is not common, although Chelsea's dissolution not an entirely isolated incident, in Massachusetts or elsewhere.<sup>12</sup> Public-sector receivership, along with other intermediary mechanisms such as court-appointed masters, has become less rare in recent years as a way of forcing change or compliance from a range of recalcitrant or delinquent public organizations, whether agencies or municipalities. In this trend, Massachusetts has been something of a pioneer: city and state agencies have faced receivership orders from state and federal courts since the early 1970s, and Spence had the unique job qualification of previously having been the receiver for Boston's public-housing authority in the 1980s.<sup>13</sup> Unacceptable conditions in the Boston schools, Boston Harbor, and the state's mental-health facilities also have brought long-term intervention from the courts. In

---

<sup>12</sup> Although previous Massachusetts examples of municipal receivership date from the Great Depression era, the school system of Lawrence, one of the first New England mill towns and now in post-industrial straits similar to Chelsea's, was placed in receivership in 1997. Other municipalities and public agencies in receivership from the 1980s through the mid-1990s in the US included Ecorse, Michigan, an industrial suburb of Detroit; school districts in the Pennsylvania rustbelt; Arcola, Texas; and Washington DC, where the US Congress appointed a Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority which soon also took over the district's public schools. Other public entities in conspicuous distress were Orange County, California, which went into bankruptcy in 1995 because of the county treasurer's professional misconduct, and Bridgeport, Connecticut, which begged a judge to let the city declare itself bankrupt; the judge refused.

<sup>13</sup> Judges at the state and federal levels have appointed masters in cases of financial emergency and of non-compliance in areas including civil rights and minimum standards of safety and health. Federal district court judge W. Arthur Garrity ordered a court master to desegregate the city's public schools in 1974, while another federal judge assigned a master to bring Boston Harbor and neglected sewer facilities for eastern Massachusetts into compliance with clean water standards (after a state judge declared a development moratorium in all 46 communities whose untreated sewage worked its way to the harbor; the same judge put the Boston Housing Authority into receivership and appointed Spence to run it). After Frederick Wiseman's 1967 documentary film *Titticut Follies* helped publicize abhorrent conditions for patients in residential mental-health facilities in Massachusetts, the state tried (with some success) to use court injunctions to prevent the film from being shown; however, the mental-health system itself later was taken over by the courts.

these instances, court-appointed masters and receivers are the agent of the judge, designing and supervising implementation of a court-ordered remedy.

This research, however, approached the occasion of receivership from a point of view closer to Turner's "social drama," in which a community responds to a serious "breach" with a process of "redress," with no guarantees of whether the outcome will be reconciliation or future division (in Mitchell, 1981; 1974). In an interview, Spence observed that receivership in America has been an "effort to deal with a set of issues challenging democratic institutions to the point where they can't deal with – usually issues of race and diversity."<sup>14</sup> Seen in this light, the charter-drafting exercise was a public conversation not only about how Chelsea would govern itself (and stay solvent) in the future but how it would define itself as a heterogenous community – some of the most difficult and unresolved questions that face urban communities in the post-industrial era of uneven development. The nature of the accompanying narratives may extend the applicability of the case's lessons (and the proposed method of narrative analysis) to other fiercely-fought battles over how the past is to be remembered, how the present is to be explained, and how the future is to be imagined.

Although some participants in the Chelsea charter-drafting process cast the charter-drafting process in terms of social-capital formation, it should be re-emphasized that the scope of this dissertation does not include the ongoing debate on how social capital is best defined or measured, or attempt to establish whether there was a net increase in social capital in Chelsea's civil accounts as a result of the charter-drafting process and the receivership

---

<sup>14</sup> Lecture at MIT, April 21, 1994.

experience as a whole. While the charter controversy could be described to some extent as a battle over whose networks constituted social capital in legitimate rather than counterfeit currency, the distinct and difficult questions of quantification are left to other seekers. It is the power of social capital as a metaphor (and its explicit utility as an important figure for some of the case study's protagonists) that gives it utility here, as well as its unexpected rapport with the three tropes as interpretive constants in planning narratives.

### *Methods*

A narrative and analytic exercise in writing about narrative and the application of narrative theory to the planning process requires an extra effort at conscientious reflection on methodology. As ethnographer Van Maanen says of such circular enterprises, "The dog doth chase its tail" (1988:xv). A similar dexterity is required in order to represent the complexities of a dense interpretive process that is multivocal in origin while unapologetically univocal in authorial opinion and control. In confronting the dilemmas and responsibilities therein, the author has been comforted, guided and challenged by others who have raised methodological issues and set methodological precedents in the sibling fields of sociology and ethnography (to which this exercise may be most closely related); among them, Portes and Stepick (1993) and Van Maanen (1988) have been the steadiest companions.

In search of methodological multivocality, the author sought out multiple sources of quantitative and qualitative evidence, including interviews, newspaper and archival research, census as well as other statistical data and their analysis by demographers (particularly those trying to fill the

"information gap" on Latinos in Massachusetts), and observations of community meetings related to the charter-drafting process as well as the charter referendum, the subsequent City Council race, and the hiring process for the first city manager. More non-traditional data sources include the poetry of Martín Espada, whose work in the early 1990s documents his encounters with Chelsea District Court as a Legal Aid tenant lawyer and demonstrates the combined effects of qualitative and quantitative data: of the counterpoint between poetry and statistics, for example, where census figures on the age of housing stock, rates of owner-occupancy, and median household income become Espada's Homeric epithet for Chelsea: "City of Coughing and Dead Radiators," the title poem in his 1993 volume.

A model for multivocal accounts of overlapping histories, Portes and Stepick's 1993 book *City on the Edge: The Transformation of Miami* serves as a powerful demonstration of the interaction between qualitative and quantitative research methods and data, highlighting the role of narrative in *not* letting numerical data, as it so is often said, speak for themselves. Their own narrative description of their research is a rich chronicle alternating between forms of inquiry and observing the interaction between the expected and unexpected objectives and discoveries of social research:

As sociologists, our principal focus was the adaptation of foreign-born minorities to their new environment. As time passed, however, it became clear that the environment itself was changing in ways that we could not have anticipated. The immigrants were transforming not only themselves, but also the city around them. Unwittingly, Miami had become the nation's first full-fledged experiment in bicultural living in the contemporary era (1993:xi).

"[T]o pursue the broader goal of analyzing the transformation of Miami,"

Portes and Stepick "had to shift methodological gears" (1993:xii) from the quantitative panel studies which they also conducted. This meant adding extensive interviews as well as additional historical research,

delv[ing] deeper into...[r]ich chronicles of the Florida peninsula and the island of Cuba...[which] helped us understand the long-term trends that gave rise to modern Miami. Yet most of those histories ended just as the city's unique [contemporary] transformation was getting underway" (1993:xiii).

Moreover, "[a]s we turned to the present, the data-gathering routine became less routine: scarcely a day passed without some new development taking place in the city. This was change not only without a blueprint, but at breakneck speed" (1993:xiii). Three different waves of events overwhelmed their anticipated point of research and narrative closure: a meteorological hurricane finally provided a narrative break-point in the city's sociological tempest of change.<sup>15</sup> Their exploration embraces a range of techniques presenting "the overlap of diverse and contradictory discourses about the city" and examining the "proximate causes of the rise of these competing discourses" in "pivotal" events, both locally and in the "more distant origins" in the histories of Florida, Cuba, and their "peculiar relationship." From their explorations (and their clarity) came strategic guidance in the layering of histories and on the question of when a story ends.

Van Maanen is particularly acute on another set of issues: on the rhetorical conventions that permit the "presence of the author" to be erased or "effaced" (1988:48) from the account of his or her research, a stage-managing process in

---

<sup>15</sup> Although they expected the research to end in 1980, it was extended first in response to the Mariel boatlift, the arrival of the Haitian "boat people," and the riot in African-American sections of the city, coming to a close with the devastation of Hurricane Andrew in 1982.



which "having finished the job of collecting data, [the author] simply vanishes behind a steady descriptive narrative...tak[ing] on something of an institutional voice" with a "studied neutrality" that serves as the basis for "textual authority" (46-7), burnished by a strategic sprinkling of minutiae and ephemera: "Details suggest intimacy and establish presence (who else could know such things?)" (49).

Despite the absence of the first-person singular, the reader should have little trouble detecting in this text a narrator making deliberate choices of data, interpretation, language, style, and endings, for all of which the author expects to be held accountable. In the spirit of full disclosure of any lingering institutional bias, it may be illuminating for the reader to know that the author brings the sensibility of a community newspaper reporter and editor to this task – thus the appetite for detail, the stomach for night meetings, a taste for conflict, a certain interpretive bile, and a reasonably good eye for reading documents upside-down on a bureaucrat's desk. As an aspirant in the documentary tradition, this work also was conducted with a respect for the responsibilities of testimony and the very real consequences of getting things wrong, tempered by the humility in literary theorist Frank Kermode's reminder of academic limitations:

It is not expected of critics as it is of poets that they should help us to make sense of our lives; they are bound only to attempt the lesser feat of making sense of the ways we try to make sense of our lives (1966:3).

## MAP OF THE TEXT

Chapter II (Background) sketches a brief political history of the city of Chelsea up to the crisis that preceded the state's imposition of receivership, as well as a description of the many different factors to which Chelsea's downfall was ascribed. It offers an overview of the city's 46 months under state control and profiles the two receivers. In addition, it introduces the historical and institutional frame which the Latino community brought to the onset of receivership and the charter-drafting process. Chapter III (Case History) then is devoted to the detailed case history of Chelsea's charter-reform effort, divided into three sections: the drafting of the charter between February and May 1994; the battle in the June 1994 referendum, in which the proposed charter was approved; and two immediate critical tests of the charter's strength as a social contract upon its implementation. A review of the relevant planning literature appears in Chapter IV (Literature Review), as well as an introduction to elements of narrative theory that support the dissertation's proposed method of narrative analysis, is presented in Chapter V (Theoretical Contribution). The methodology is applied to the case material in Chapter VI (Case Analysis). Chapter VII (Conclusion) recapitulates the dissertation's argument in light of the case analysis and offers some final reflections.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Additional detail on city charters, charter reform, municipal receivership, and the city-manager movement can be found in the appendices, along with a brief historical review of trope and metaphor, a more extensive analysis of the mediator's own written account of the Chelsea charter-drafting process from a social-capital perspective, notes on categorization, and an interview excerpt that highlights the challenges of qualitative research and the ambiguities of narrative interpretation.

## II. BACKGROUND

### INTRODUCTION: OPENING THE GATES OF HELL

In September 1991, on the verge of bankruptcy, much of its warring political leadership soon to be facing indictment, Chelsea submitted to state receivership to manage its tangled affairs. Mired in budget deficits and political deadlock, Mayor John Brennan had made a desperate plea to the Massachusetts legislature to release his City Hall from the burdens of governance:

I beg of you, don't open the gates of heaven and let us in, but for God's sake, please open the gates of hell and let us out.<sup>17</sup>

Bleak conditions indeed prevailed in this poor suburb of about 30,000 people just north of Boston: the threat of insolvency and a crumbling tax base; a barnacled administrative apparatus and deeply-embedded corruption; flagrant drug-distribution, gambling, and money-laundering networks; and simmering tensions between an older white ethnic population and growing Latino and Asian immigrant communities. With the blessing of Chelsea's own legislators, the State House had granted the mayor's wish. Opening the gates of this public hell had required only one simple legislative act: revoking the city's charter, thereby formally dissolving the city's municipal autonomy. For the first time since the Great Depression, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts exercised its pre-emptive powers to put one of its own cities out of business, taking Chelsea under direct state control.

---

<sup>17</sup> Brian McGrory, "Legislative Panel Backs Chelsea Receivership," *Boston Globe*, September 8, 1991, p. 1 (Metro/Region).

*Cities & City Charters:  
Formal & Informal Rules of the Game*

American cities have a tradition of fierce independence, but they are literally creatures of the state, each municipal corporation chartered in the English tradition as "a body politic and corporate," with a circumscribed set of powers and privileges that can be revoked or enlarged only at the pleasure of the state legislature.<sup>18</sup> The city charter is ultimately a corporate veil, and state-imposed or court-ordered receivership withdraws altogether the independent status previously conferred by charter. A city loses both its political independence and its fiscal authority, while voters lose the franchise at the local level; a receiver replaces all elected and appointed officials as sole decision maker on behalf of the state. Chelsea's disintegration revealed the extent, not usually so visible to the naked eye, to which cities stand as fragile legal fictions on the thin foundation of a charter – on a piece of paper that transfers authority from one level of government to another.

A charter not only marks the boundary between state and local government; it also determines how that power is distributed within the local governmental apparatus. It lays down a municipality's formal political structure: whether the chief executive is elected or appointed, whether legislators are elected by district or citywide, how long their terms run, what other local boards have jurisdiction over local policy and how they are constituted.<sup>19</sup> One way to measure a charter's scope is in the breach rather

---

<sup>18</sup> See Engin F. Isin, *Cities Without Citizens: The Modernity of the City as a Corporation* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1992) and Gary J. Miller, *Cities by Contract: The Politics of Municipal Incorporation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981).

<sup>19</sup> Other levels of detail are established via municipal ordinance and administrative code, although there is some discretion about where issues are allocated among them.

than the observance: in Chelsea's case, to look at what happened to the array of powers previously distributed among municipal officials, both elected and appointed. Under receivership, those powers literally disappeared.<sup>20</sup>

By annulling Chelsea's existing charter, the receivership legislation abolished the mayor's office. It reduced the Board of Aldermen to advisory status along with the School Committee and the rest of the city's boards and commissions; they no longer had authority to make binding decisions, only recommendations to the receiver, who was free to ignore them. Armed with powers to hire and fire, to write the city budget and to appropriate funds, to reduce costs and to re-organize city services, to raise old fees and to set new ones, to rezone and to change streets, to buy or sell city property, even to initiate federal bankruptcy proceedings if all else failed, the receiver had a mandate for total administrative and fiscal control. However circumscribed municipal power may be by authority reserved to other levels of the state, receivership made clear by omission the ordinary powers of self-government Chelsea had lost.

By the same token, to rewrite a charter is not just a dry matter of drawing up a new organizational flow chart, not merely a legalistic enterprise in arcane provisions for daily operations and emergency conditions. It is a more vital enterprise than that, because from the organizational charts of government ripple out a series of subtle effects, both intentional and unanticipated, on the political dynamics of a community: the overall form of government, the

---

<sup>20</sup> These were temporary powers, time-limited under the terms of the legislation; the receiver's office technically could have been brought to a close as early as September 30, 1994, but the state secretary of administration and finance was empowered to extend the receiver's post for each of the following two years, for a maximum total duration of five years. In fact, the receivership ended before maximum allowed by Chapter 200.

distribution of elected and appointed offices, the scale of the city's wards or districts.

Moreover, by setting the formal structure, a city charter also gives rise to the informal structure, locating points of political leverage and access with some precision.<sup>21</sup> The formal rules determine the way through the front door, the informal rules the way through the back door, the grayer areas of influence and information. Again, Chelsea's experience reveals this dual process by omission: after September 1991, the Chelsea receiver controlled all the access points, all the places where pressure, legitimate and illegitimate, previously had been brought to bear on local decision-making in the city. By virtue of his unilateral authority to write the new city charter, the receiver also had in his hands a powerful instrument for shaping the city's future political culture. If writing a charter is an exercise in how the game will be played, re-writing a charter determines how much and in what ways the rules will change.

The state of Massachusetts went into Chelsea with the clear intent of changing the rules of the game: of using charter reform as both the agent and the symbol of structural transformation. Below, a brief history of Chelsea through September 1991 reviews how this intervention came about. After cycling through Chelsea's municipal charters since the colonial era, it sketches how the various constituencies within the city reacted to the imposition of receivership. The text then examines the varying theories circulated about why Chelsea became a ward of the state, followed by a summary of the receivership and sketches of the two receivers. The chapter

---

<sup>21</sup> The state's expert on charters and charter commissions, Marilyn Contreas in the Executive Office of Communities and Development, called a city's "charter an indirect influence on the political dynamic, depend[ing on] how [it] gets implemented" (July 13, 1995 interview).

closes with a snapshot of the very different historical and institutional frame the Latino community brought to the receivership period: its experience as part of the Caribbean, Central American, and Latin American diaspora; and the ongoing struggle over the privatization of the Chelsea school system through a ten-year contract with Boston University, which many activists – Latino and otherwise – opposed as an undemocratic intervention.

**BEFORE THE FALL:  
A HISTORICAL PORTRAIT OF CHELSEA**

Massachusetts' tiniest city and one of its poorest, Chelsea stands on less than two square miles of dry land, encircled by industrial corridors and crosshatched by truck routes. A functional extension of the port of Boston, in 1991 its waterfront was lined with derelict piers, the remains of aging oil-storage tanks, and mineral piles unloaded from huge freighters, their indeterminate grit blowing into the Ward I neighborhood. Further inland, in an area checkered by still-vacant urban-renewal sites, are the wholesale produce distributors that moved north from Boston's congested Quincy Market in the 1960s. less than two miles overland from Logan International Airport, the city lies directly under the flight path of the airport's longest – and noisiest – runway. From the vantage point of strict location theory, Chelsea has several assets on which it might have been expected to capitalize over the past 20 years: a strategic metropolitan location near the region's major airport and downtown Boston, buildable lots in its interior, and a shoreline in industrial transition with a view of the rising downtown skyline. Nonetheless, the city was bypassed during the real-estate boom of the 1980s, even as a candidate for the back-office functions that Boston's finance, insurance, and real-estate sector spun off to other suburbs north of the city. Without a direct subway connection and with a proud insularity, the city remained at arm's length from Boston, economically and imaginatively.

The chronicle of Chelsea's economic and social history mirrors the state's evolutionary patterns of industrialization and immigration. In the 1830s, 30 people lived on four farms in Chelsea; by the Civil War, there were 12,000



residents in the newly-incorporated city limits.<sup>22</sup> The population nearly doubled again over the next 30 years, representing primarily an influx of Irish, Italian, Polish, and Russian immigrants. By 1885, almost 40 percent of the workforce was in manufacturing: printing, food preparation, building, leather, iron goods, and other industries. Even after the 1908 fire had destroyed 2400 homes, 700 businesses, and most of the city's public buildings, Chelsea's industrial base continued to grow: by 1915, factory jobs had more than doubled and the total product of the city had quadrupled. With railroad lines from the north and west linked to its waterfront, the city was integrated into the port of Boston; there also was a thriving commerce in rags, junk, and salvage. The city's population peaked in 1930 with 45,000 residents. After World War II, two trends appeared simultaneously: an increasing outflow of white families from Chelsea to the suburbs as well as an increasing influx of Latinos – initially as a Puerto Rican enclave – into the city.

In 1950, just over half of the city's 10,000 jobs were still in manufacturing, and the city's industrial base seemed a secure foundation for the future. A 1955 planning report recommended that the city double the substantial acreage already zoned for manufacturing, failing to anticipate the next 30 years of industrial attrition, both in Chelsea and statewide.<sup>23</sup> By 1980, only 26 percent of Chelsea's employment opportunities were in manufacturing, half the

---

<sup>22</sup> Figures on Chelsea's industrial development and population through 1930 come from the opening chapters of Edward J. Kopf, *The Intimate City, A Study of Urban Social Order: Chelsea, Massachusetts, 1906-1915* (Brandeis University, unpublished PhD dissertation, 1974), the Chelsea Planning Board's *First Report on a General Plan for Chelsea* (1955), the 1974 *Draft Environmental Impact Statement: Murray Industrial Park Urban Renewal Project* (Chelsea Redevelopment Authority), and the 1968 *Comprehensive Plan: Economic Activity* (The Planning Services Group, Cambridge MA).

<sup>23</sup> Chelsea Planning Board, *First Report on a General Plan for Chelsea* (1955), pp. 35-37.

number of industrial jobs in 1970.<sup>24</sup> This figure had been affected only marginally by a second devastating fire in 1973, a blaze which cleared about a hundred acres of salvage yards and other industrial activity abutting the area already identified as an urban-renewal district. The city expected the federal funding application it filed soon after to spark new development, reviving the dormant economy. Some projects came to fruition – a mall, a scattering of squat suburban-scale office buildings, and condominium development in the waterfront district of brick row-houses and at the old Chelsea Naval Hospital site – but the next 15 years were a period of largely unfulfilled anticipation.

At the end of the 1980s, it was clear that while Chelsea had not participated in greater Boston's economic boom, it shared fully in the bust. By 1991, the city had lost another 700 manufacturing jobs, without the significant countervailing growth in the retail or service sectors that had buoyed employment statistics for the Boston metropolitan area.<sup>25</sup> Chelsea had fewer total jobs than at any time in the previous decade, and fewer private-sector jobs than at any point since 1970. Moreover, as industries departed and the fuel farms began to close, many sites were left contaminated and thus undevelopable without a massive and costly clean-up, compounding the damage to the local economy. However, the city had other industries: it was well-known to investigators (and apparently to truckers up and down the East Coast) as an epicenter of gambling and wholesale drug distribution point in greater Boston through a network of bars and social clubs with ties to both corrupt Chelsea police officials and organized crime.

---

<sup>24</sup> Employment figures by sector between 1970 and 1991 from Mt. Auburn Associates, *The Chelsea Initiative: An Economic Development Strategy for the City of Chelsea*. June 25, 1993.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

According to census data, Chelsea stood among the most distressed cities in the state in both 1980 and 1990, and other indicators filled out the portrait of a city in trouble.<sup>26</sup> Although the Massachusetts infant-mortality rate retreated during the 1980s, Chelsea's had more than doubled. The high-school dropout rate was lodged stubbornly above 50 percent, while students ranked near the bottom on basic-skills test scores statewide. Statistically, it was a city of pre-war apartment buildings with absentee landlords: more than 70 percent of its housing stock was more than 50 years old (much of it built just after the first Chelsea fire), while less than 30 percent was owner-occupied and almost 90 percent were multi-family units – a "city of coughing and dead radiators," as poet Martín Espada called it in his 1993 volume of poems drawn largely from his experiences as a Legal Aid lawyer in Chelsea District Court.

Since the seventeenth century, Chelsea has been a gateway settlement, a point of entry for immigrants from almost every continent. In 1890, European-born residents accounted for 28.5 percent of the population, a figure jumping to 42.5 percent by 1910. Receiver Spence reminded audiences that the city's first bilingual-education controversy had occurred in 1911, over the use of Yiddish in the public schools.<sup>27</sup> The 1990 census portrayed a city undergoing a similar

---

<sup>26</sup> In a panel of 10 older industrial cities in Massachusetts, Chelsea moved during the 1980s from being the one with the highest poverty rate to the third highest, hovering just below the statewide percentage. All of those cities, except for Boston, lost ground in relation to the statewide median family income, while the "poverty gap" between these cities and the rest of the state grew. But unemployment in Chelsea increased more than it had in the other cities, and by 1990 stood at a disastrous 12.1 percent, 80 percent over the statewide average. Robert J. S. Ross and Jean Riesman, "Choosing Your Parents Well: Structure, Competence and Corruption in Coping with Municipal Fiscal Stress," in Joseph S. Slavet, ed., *Municipal Fiscal Stress in Massachusetts: Prognosis and Prescription* (Boston: The John W. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs, University of Massachusetts/Boston, September 1994), pp. 50-92; Mt. Auburn Associates, *op. cit.* According to the 1990 Census, Chelsea's median family income was the lowest of the 37 municipalities north of Boston (Amy Sessler, "Latin-American Center for Chelsea Gets Support," *Boston Globe*, August 9, 1992, p. 1 [North Weekly]).

<sup>27</sup> Lecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), May 5, 1993.

wave, now primarily Latino and Asian in origin: of the 28,000 Chelsea residents enumerated, the Latino population was estimated at close to a third of the total – a twofold increase since 1980.<sup>28</sup> Whether or not this count accurately reflected the total number of residents, the city's future was foreshadowed in the census figures showing that over 60 percent of the population under age 18 was non-white or of Spanish origin, and the Chelsea school population already exceeded 70 percent Hispanic. Meanwhile, the city's non-Hispanic white population declined 20 percent during the 1980s, to 59 percent of the total, or just under 17,000; Chelsea lost an estimated 5500 white residents to the suburbs and points beyond over the decade.<sup>29</sup>

Before receivership, Chelsea operated under a 1911 city charter that, with the aid of accumulated amendments, helped turn the city's politics into structural stalemate.<sup>30</sup> The mayor and the aldermen could point to separate sections in the charter that appeared to charge the executive and the legislative branches simultaneously with the authority for hiring and firing as well as administrative and fiscal decision-making. Lines of authority also were clouded by boards, commissions, and agencies with competing mandates, particularly in land-use planning and economic development. In addition, city departments had become fiefdoms, often controlled for years by individuals with no professional training but protected by Civil Service rules,

---

<sup>28</sup> By the end of the 1990s, even with dilemmas of undercounting, Latinos were the state's fastest growing population – see Rivera in Melendez and Rivera, *op. cit.*, pp 38-9. Some local organizations, including the Chelsea Human Services Collaborative, estimated that the city's population was closer to 35,000.

<sup>29</sup> See "Latinos in Chelsea," Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy, University of Massachusetts at Boston, 1992.

<sup>30</sup> A complete analysis of the flaws in the 1911 charter appears in a report by Susan Emery Hendrickson and Edmund Beard, *Governance Reform in Chelsea, Massachusetts: Historical Analysis and Future Directions* (Boston: John W. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs, University of Massachusetts/Boston, March 1993).

with nonchalant accounting procedures and myriad opportunities to sup at the public table.<sup>31</sup> A report on the weaknesses in Chelsea's governmental structure argued that corruption not only poisoned the city's political culture but also drained the city's fiscal resources – an economic cost measured in the diversion of public money, inflated municipal contracts, and the tax revenues foregone from development that never occurred.<sup>32</sup> Later indictments indicated that an 1986 amendment to strengthen the mayor's hand had served only to exacerbate this problem.

Meanwhile, the fiscal consequences of protracted economic decline rested an increasing proportion of the tax burden on residential property-owners, while median income was falling. State revenues had helped buffer the impact of a property-tax limit and roll-back measure that Massachusetts voters approved by referendum in 1980, but by one calculation, in the decade since the tax cap (known as "Proposition 2 1/2") went into effect, Chelsea's tax base had dropped from \$14.5 million to \$13 million, representing a 44-percent drop after inflation.<sup>33</sup> The math was relatively simple. With constantly rising

---

<sup>31</sup> A former Chelsea vice-squad captain was convicted of tax evasion, but acquitted on related charges of conspiracy, gambling, and money-laundering, while three other former police vice-squad members were convicted of receiving illegal payoffs as well as other gambling, tax-evasion, and obstruction of justice charges. A former police sergeant admitted on the witness stand that he had accepted bribes on the job, but was given immunity for his cooperation. The past four mayors – as well as a substantial number of other city officials, local developers, and professionals doing business with the city – were indicted on bribery-related charges (and all the mayors, among others, have pled guilty). Others were prosecuted for diverting city water and gasoline to their private use.

<sup>32</sup> Hendrickson & Beard, *op. cit.*

<sup>33</sup> Brian McGrory, "Democrats Balk at Plan for Chelsea Receivership," *Boston Globe*, September 7, 1991, p. 1 (Metro/Region). The referendum question's clever tag referred to two separate 2.5-percent mandates: property taxes were limited to 2.5 percent of the cash value of the local tax base and could climb only 2.5 percent per year; in addition, 2.5 percent of the value of new development could be added to the tax levy. The new rule also required communities exceeding the 2.5-percent ceiling – a roster including Chelsea – to roll back their tax levy 15 percent per year until they met the mandate. All municipalities were required to go through property revaluation, and motor-vehicle excise taxes – a steady local revenue stream – also

expenses, the city's fiscal health thus depended either on successfully exploiting its development opportunities or on the continuous state transfusions engineered by the city's powerful state legislative delegation. And when the state's revenues went into a sudden decline at the end of the decade, Chelsea lost its fiscal buffer. Meanwhile, Chelsea voters voted down a \$2-million Proposition 2 1/2 override in April 1991.

Although law enforcement and other factors may have played unacknowledged roles in prompting receivership, the trigger for the crisis in September 1991 was budgetary. As a condition of a \$5-million emergency state loan in 1986, the Massachusetts Department of Revenue had installed an Emergency Finance Control Board in Chelsea (as it had in three other Massachusetts cities in similar cash-flow circumstances) to approve budgets and appropriations. In July 1991, that board rejected the city's proposed budget as well as a subsequent \$3.5-million budget extension for September.

Anticipating a crisis after the failure of the Proposition 2 1/2 override in April, the state secretary of administration and finance already had convened a different committee – known formally and informally as the Ad Hoc Committee – to weigh three options for Chelsea: state receivership, annexation to an adjacent municipality (possibly Boston, whose mayor indicated an interest in absorbing its waterfront), and outright bankruptcy. In August, the committee recommended receivership.

After the finance board refused the September budget extension, it took less than a week for the state to impose receivership on the city. Without an approved budget, the Chelsea schools had failed to open on schedule and City

---

were cut to the 2.5-percent level (*i.e.*, \$25 per \$1000 of value).

Hall workers went without their paychecks because there were no funds for the city payroll. On the Friday after Labor Day, Gov. Weld introduced legislation to put Chelsea into state receivership, asking the legislature for a 48-hour turnaround on the bill which, as a "home-rule" petition, needed a two-thirds vote in each chamber.<sup>34</sup> At an unusual Saturday hearing of the joint Local Affairs Committee on Beacon Hill, Mayor Brennan made his plea for intervention. Over the initial objections of the Senate president, who had wanted a Proposition-2 1/2 override provision that would force the city to raise some of its needed revenues from local property taxes, the legislature delivered with extraordinary efficiency.<sup>35</sup> On Wednesday, September 11, Chapter 200 – "An Act Establishing a Receivership in the City of Chelsea" – passed both chambers of the legislature by the necessary margin, with the full support of the city's powerful State House delegation. Releasing the desperate mayor from the burdens of governance, the state legislature formally suspended the city's independent status, and the governor installed a receiver with sweeping powers to make unilateral decisions on all the critical and divisive elements of urban policy.

---

<sup>34</sup> A legacy of the Progressive era, the "home-rule" amendment to the Massachusetts state constitution was meant to protect cities from being ambushed by special legislation that did not meet with local approval (or could not get passed locally; also a mechanism by which state legislatures instruct municipalities to "bring us issues with local politics already resolved" (Richard Kobayashi, interview, February 8, 1995).

<sup>35</sup> Senate president William F. Bulger opposed state intervention, since Chelsea voters had declined to take fiscal responsibility via the proposed Proposition 2 1/2 override, although others argued that it had been a rational choice not to give the city's current leadership more money to squander. Bulger was close to Chelsea state Sen. Birmingham (who the Senate president had elevated rapidly to chair of the powerful Ways and Means Committee), and he ultimately deferred to his lieutenant's preferences for his own district, telling the Boston press that "...I, in my characteristically magnanimous and democratic way, will let people make their own mistakes" (Peter J. Howe and Brian McGrory, "Bulger Predicts OK on Receiver; Says He Won't Fight Chelsea Bill," *Boston Globe*, September 11, 1991, p. 27 [Metro/Region]).

*From Town to City to Limbo:  
Chelsea's Charter History*

The history of Chelsea's municipal charters up to the receivership period traces the city's geopolitical evolution from an isolated pre-Revolutionary settlement for one Tory family to a densely-populated industrial immigrant city. First chartered as an independent township in 1737, Chelsea was a rural outpost and an elite seaside summer retreat for Boston's Yankee aristocracy until the mid-nineteenth century. In 1831, a group of speculators acquired land and established steam ferry service to Boston, hoping to capitalize on the impending land shortage on the Shawmut peninsula. Their eye for the Boston real-estate market and its effect on the other side of the harbor was keen: by 1860, Chelsea had 12,000 residents as well as its first city charter. Rapid growth had swamped the town meeting as the central forum of government, and in 1857, Chelsea's citizens transformed their settlement to a city – an urban entity that appeared to them sufficiently dense and complex that its proper management required a mayor, as well as political subdivision into five wards, from which the new Board of Aldermen would be elected.<sup>36</sup>

The 1857 charter held until 1908, when the first great Chelsea fire leveled the city. Like the floods of Galveston and Dayton, the disaster provided ready justification for an enormous institutional intervention. The disaster

---

<sup>36</sup>According to Kopf, the population's increase in both numbers and heterogeneity created a perceived need to control town meetings by limiting participation: "By 1857, Chelsea's growth forced it to abandon the town meeting form of government. The problems of running the locality were increasing; and the town meeting was an inefficient way of dealing with them...The shoulder-rubbing of members of different social groups in the crowded town hall only exacerbated natural tensions and difficulties" (1974:48). See also comments on choice of mayoral/aldermanic form of government, pp. 48-50.



prompted a series of gestures that foreshadowed receivership many years later: after local commercial, financial, and manufacturing groups petitioned the legislature to "assure to the city a government that will command the confidence of the money and insurance interests," the governor withdrew Chelsea's charter and appointed a panel of Yankee businessmen – a commission modeled on Galveston, unequivocally named the Board of Control – to manage recovery (1974:61). Assuming the combined political authority of the mayor, the aldermen, and the school committee, the Board of Control presided over reconstruction for three years and wrote a new city charter. Contrary to the Progressivist trend, this new charter gave the mayor weak powers by comparison to the aldermen and served not so much to separate powers as to diffuse them – presumably a calculated effort to prevent any one ethnic group from dominating the polyglot city.<sup>37</sup> Over the next 80 years, lines of authority also were clouded by ambiguous language in the original charter and contrarian amendments to it, as well as a plethora of boards with competing mandates, particularly in land-use planning and economic development.

Progressive-era good-government advocates might have regarded Chelsea in the decade before receivership as an ideal candidate for their template of reforms.<sup>38</sup> Because of the structural stalemate enabled by the existing charter, much of Chelsea's political energy was spent in often fruitless competition among the players. A 1993 report on the city's governance structure argued that frustration with petty battles and grandstanding in City Hall generated increasingly weak candidates for office, with correspondingly weak

---

<sup>37</sup> See Hendrickson and Beard, *op. cit.*

<sup>38</sup> See Appendix A for more detail.

appointments to key municipal offices.<sup>39</sup> Another consultant tactfully noted that Chelsea's fierce local pride and insularity produced a "historical unwillingness to employ individuals in key city positions from outside the city."<sup>40</sup> As a result, in pre-lapsarian Chelsea, city departments were fiefdoms often controlled for years by individuals with no professional training. In a historical irony of urban reform, incumbents were protected by the Civil Service rules that had been championed at the turn of the century as yet another way to buffer city administrators from political pressures.

Whether or not Chelsea's political gridlock was wholly the direct result of structural flaws in the charter, the characters who enacted that gridlock made the structure of city government a visible target for reform. Chelsea's City Hall follies from 1976 to 1991 read as a kind of manic Shakespearean parody in two acts with four mayors, all of whom are indicted before the curtain falls. The opening scenes were something other than farce. Joel Pressman, whose eight years in office bridged the city's urban-renewal efforts in the late 1970s and the first years of implementing Proposition 2 1/2 in the early 1980s, had a reputation for competence and personal energy that, as one state official said, "hid the fact that the charter was useless. His personality overcame the structural deficits in Chelsea."<sup>41</sup> However, his personal trajectory was the one closest to tragedy. Considered the most competent of all the mayors later implicated in corruption cases involving political favors, he thus registered as the biggest disappointment; as one Chelsea-watcher said privately with obvious regret, "He was a crook, but he moved the city forward."

---

<sup>39</sup> Hendrickson and Beard, *op. cit.*

<sup>40</sup> KS Associates, *Management Study For the City of Chelsea*, Final Report, 1986, p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> Marilyn Contreas, interview, July 13, 1995.

Pressman's successor, combative former alderman James Mitchell, lasted a single term marked by public confrontations with other city officials, prolonged absences from City Hall, and threats to resign followed by dramatic re-entries into the public eye. He failed to attend hearings on his own proposed budget, and came within 45 signatures of facing a recall election after reportedly sunning himself in the backyard instead of attending Chelsea High School graduation.<sup>42</sup> When Mitchell later testified vigorously against the receivership bill at the emergency September 1991 hearing on Beacon Hill, the chair of the Local Affairs Committee told him, "If there is any convincing testimony today as to why there should be a receiver in Chelsea, it is yours."<sup>43</sup>

Leaving his successor, Thomas Nolan, a \$1.5-million deficit and an anticipated \$3.5-million shortfall the following year, Mitchell also demonstrated that even though local aid constituted the city's single largest source of revenue by fiscal 1984, the extra state aid was not a source of fiscal stability in an unstable City Hall.<sup>44</sup> Nolan successfully solicited a \$5-million interest-free emergency loan from the legislature to cover the gap he inherited. However, as a condition of the loan, the city was required to hire a professionally-trained chief financial officer, and the state Department of Revenue (DOR) installed an Emergency Finance Control Board to approve annual budgets as well as appropriations.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, the state gave

---

<sup>42</sup> Mitchell's antics were compiled in the *Chelsea Record's* 1984 "Year in Review" and "The Year That Was..." by columnist Josh Reznick, both published on December 31, 1984. The tales were repeated in many subsequent news accounts in the Boston press and confirmed in an interview with Elizabeth and John McBride and their son Tim, who helped lead the recall effort (June 9, 1994).

<sup>43</sup> Rep. Christopher J. Hodgkins, quoted in Brian McGrory, "Legislative Panel Backs Chelsea Receivership," *Boston Globe*, September 8, 1991, p. 1 (Metro/Region).

<sup>44</sup> Massachusetts Municipal Association, *Budget Perspective Report* (1986).

<sup>45</sup> This was a common procedure, and the state instituted similar boards in Brockton, Holyoke, Lawrence, and other cities securing state bail-out money in the 1980s; the panels had no line-

the city a series of "urban management" and "strategic planning" grants, underwriting consultants' reports that made basic suggestions about reorganizing Chelsea City Hall. However, these efforts were not coordinated across state or local bureaucratic lines, and they had little impact on either daily operations or structural obstacles.

After Mitchell's antic regime, almost any replacement would have been a welcome respite, but Nolan proved problematic in his own right: he was fined twice by the State Ethics Commission during his two-year term in office.<sup>46</sup> Nolan pushed through the Board of Aldermen and the state legislature a charter amendment strengthening the hand of the mayor, but one deputy receiver later argued that even with the amendment, it was a "mythological" idea that Chelsea had had a strong-mayor government, because no staff actually worked for the mayor; in fact, the mayor appointed only the city engineer, and could not enforce direct reporting from other departments.<sup>47</sup> The concentrated efforts to bring Chelsea into the fiscal daylight were fitful: the city's first chief financial officer lasted only 14 months, resigning after a showdown with the entrenched city treasurer. Nonetheless, as Mayor Nolan left office, the local newspaper credited him with "return[ing] dignity to City Hall," and even while issuing ominous warnings about the city's deteriorating financial condition, praised him for being "able to forestall the 'day of reckoning.'"<sup>48</sup>

---

item veto or power to propose specific changes or amendments. Note: usually abbreviated and referred to as "FCB."

<sup>46</sup> Nolan was disciplined first for appointing his own brother to the Chelsea Housing Authority, then for altering the date of a captain's exam to the advantage of a particular group of firefighters.

<sup>47</sup> Edward Cyr, assistant receiver for administration and finance, interview, February 23, 1994.

<sup>48</sup> From the *Chelsea Record's* "Year in Review," December 31, 1987.

It was not long forestalled. By the fall of 1989, the city's name had become a suburban epithet, when a candidate for the Woburn City Council pledged to keep his hometown from becoming "the Chelsea of the North."<sup>49</sup> The city's public schools had been privatized under the ten-year management contract with Boston University. The state's \$5-million loan was exhausted, and by the next fiscal year, state aid had risen to over \$20 million, a full 45 percent of the city's operating budget. Meanwhile, life in Chelsea went on with Ecclesiastian regularity. The chairman of the Traffic Commission was re-instated for a thirty-fifth term; the Board of Aldermen, for the fifth time in 20 years, voted to demolish a building on Washington Avenue; Nolan's successor, Mayor John Brennan, ceremoniously retired Eric the police dog.

Brennan also presided over a series of desperate fiscal measures, including an unsuccessful Proposition-2 1/2 override that would have raised \$15 million for the city treasury. But in September 1991, he added a new dimension to the duties of the strong executive in Chelsea City Hall: to trudge up Beacon Hill and ask the state to take over his job. The rules of the game were suspended, and they were about to undergo a traumatic two-stage process of change – first municipal receivership, then the crafting of a new city charter.

*Chelsea Reacts:*

*Municipal Receivership or "Political Deceivership"?*

Their responses ranging from outrage to resignation to outright relief, Chelsea's constituencies did not greet receivership uniformly. When the mayor first sought political asylum on Beacon Hill, some aldermen started

---

<sup>49</sup> *Chelsea Record*, November 1, 1989.

wearing black armbands to protest the "death" of Chelsea, and one appointed official took to introducing himself as "the former chairman of the former Board of Appeals of the former city of Chelsea."<sup>50</sup> Former mayor James Mitchell claimed that the full force of state power had been mobilized expressly to prevent his re-election in the upcoming city elections in November, raging, "This isn't fiscal receivership, this is political deceivership."<sup>51</sup> Supporters of state takeover welcomed receivership with the mixed feelings that might arise when an alcoholic uncle finally loses his driver's license: vindication and relief that some outside agency had interceded at last, shame that ultimately it had to be so public and out of the family's control. A broad set of Chelsea residents, however, continued to resent the state takeover of their City Hall, arguing that Chelsea was no more corrupt or mismanaged than its neighbors nor more negligent of its economic-development opportunities than other Massachusetts cities in similar post-industrial straits; one alderman captured the tone of local resentment, as well as a sense that Chelsea was being unfairly singled out, saying, "You could throw a rock in Revere and hit a bar where the same thing going on."<sup>52</sup> Within that group, a critical mass around an aldermanic hub dug in for a long, steady resistance campaign.

Although Chelsea historically was a city where local politics was a contact sport played with gusto on all sides, by the end of the 1980s a significant segment of Chelsea residents had walked away from local political involvement, and voting levels had dropped to historic lows. Spence and

---

<sup>50</sup> Tom Coakley and Amy Sessler, "Chelsea Goes to School, Court," *Boston Globe*, September 17, 1991, p. 19 (Metro/Region).

<sup>51</sup> Brian McGrory, "Brennan Leaves Office with Hope and a Legacy of Futility," *Boston Globe*, September 13, 1991, p. 1 (Metro/Region).

<sup>52</sup> Stephen Powers, interview, July 26, 1994.

others argued that among the city's white ethnic voters, even some party faithfuls ultimately had been driven away by the "fratricidal" practices of politics in Chelsea's assorted chambers, and that most potential reformers had been intimidated into withdrawing from the arena. Nonetheless, there was genuine grief over the onset of receivership among residents still proud of their hometown – particularly among the elderly in Chelsea's longstanding white ethnic communities, whose persistent habit of political involvement was striking amid the city's political malaise. Then-School Committee member Marta Rosa, running for re-election on the eve of receivership, gave a poignant but also politically canny description of the mood in the elderly-housing complex where she was campaigning the night receivership went through in September 1991:

...the Wednesday night when receivership was supposed to be voted on and the receiver was supposed to be announced, I was speaking at the elderly building on Bloomingdale [Avenue], and the faces on the elderly people the night we were speaking to them [were] so devastating! And I had to get up and give a speech that was motivating and, you know, "This is happening, but we can move forward if we stay together...[T]he elderly really care for this city. They're...invested, even in the schools. People tell me they're not, but when I campaign, most of my support in the white community comes from the elderly. That's where I get a lot of my support to win at-large elections, because I can't win at-large elections with just the Latino voters you saw in the last election. So the Hispanic vote doesn't carry me across the city. It's the elderly vote..."<sup>53</sup>

Rosa's observation that the elderly had been a reliable part of her electoral base in each of her campaigns contradicted a common perception that older white residents were detached from politics because of the city's ongoing ethnic transition.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> Interview, April 4, 1995.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* When she ran against Harry German for City Council, he came in ahead of her; her analysis of that outcome: "It's the elderly vote – except this time I was running against an

In the Latino community, response to the imposition of receivership ranged largely from informed to uninformed indifference. Latino identity is far from monolithic and political involvement in the city occurred across a broad spectrum. A core – but not always unified – set of activists had been working since the 1970s on cultural and political issues, ranging from an annual summer Latino festival to protests against police brutality of local Latinos, and many of those names and faces were visible during the receivership period, working with, for, or against City Hall. For many others, particularly the more recent immigrants, the sense of disconnection from Chelsea's existing municipal regime was so profound that the dissolution of city government and the advent of the receiver was of little daily consequence. Once receivership had been imposed, the question for the more politically engaged members of the Latino community – as well as a progressive multi-racial alliance of residents and staff in the city's human-services agencies and community organizations – became whether the reformulation of city government would open or leave intact the barriers to Latino political participation, particularly in the context of the ongoing controversy over Boston University's contract to manage the Chelsea Public Schools – then only two years into its ten-year life-span.

Each of these communities stood in particular relation to the arrival and enactment of receivership, their members poised by their collective and individual histories to respond to issues raised during or by the receivership in a particular way.<sup>55</sup> These responses were not uniform or automatic, but

---

elderly, which was the difference, for the same seat. So the allegiances shift."

<sup>55</sup> This research did not assess perception of receivership among other constituencies. Although there had been a growing Asian population in the late 1980s, it was not yet politically visible



they were shaped and colored by their personal experience and what they understood as the political experience of their identified community.

---

as of early 1990s, and the one Cambodian representative appointed to the charter-drafting committee during the receivership did not take his seat, nor was he replaced with an alternate. In the city's small black community, few were active during the receivership, although one member of a politically-prominent family, Gwendolyn Robinson Cofer, served on the charter-drafting committee and on the city's planning advisory board. One of the most visible anti-receivership activists, Tsegeye "Mike" Mekonnen, was an Ethiopian who considered himself as an unhyphenated African in America, and his hostility matched that of the core of white ethnic opponents to receivership. He shared the view that receivership was the second of two invasions of Chelsea, the first having been by the British in 1774, and warranting a similar response, as against an illegitimate imperial power (interview, March 26, 1995).

## WHY RECEIVERSHIP? WHY CHELSEA?

Other Massachusetts cities were in a comparably unstable position in the late 1980s, and the question lingered throughout the receivership period: why was Chelsea the target of such dramatic intervention from the State House, rather than the similarly distressed Brockton, Lawrence, or Holyoke, each of which had its own state-imposed Finance Control Board? Speculation about the impetus for receivership never came entirely to rest, and it animated many disputes over the course of the next four years. It was the background roar in the endless parlor game among Chelsea participants and observers, a permanent floating debate over what accounted for the city's demise on the one hand and the governor's aggressive gesture on the other. Was Chelsea's apocalypse brought on by political corruption or political stalemate – by generations of dirty pool, or merely a raucous never-ending tournament where no one was allowed to win for long? Was it the one-two punch of managerial incompetence and self-interested malfeasance? Or did the global process of economic restructuring take the city's fate utterly out of its own hands? Was it inevitable that a land-poor city could not support itself as an independent entity? What was the contributing role of demographic change and racial hostility in the city's decline? Had Chelsea's powerful state delegation failed to protect the city, or had they protected it for too long? Was the state's sudden interest in Chelsea a power play for control of the city's waterfront and its potential redevelopment? And how were those deals an improvement on the city's older forms of "insider trading"? These swirling questions were fueled in part by the mixed character of the evidence, which provided at least a dozen different possible explanatory variables:

- ◆ political corruption,
- ◆ organized crime,
- ◆ protected incompetence,
- ◆ futile boosterism,
- ◆ immigration and demographic changes,
- ◆ Logan Airport expansion,
- ◆ other waterfront-development plans,
- ◆ fiscal starvation due to declining property-tax revenue,
- ◆ negative economies of scale,
- ◆ predatory public-employee contracts,
- ◆ the Boston University contract,
- ◆ global economic restructuring, and
- ◆ political opportunism.

Each of these variables posed causes and purposes, identified pushes and pulls, located responsibility for Chelsea's troubles inside or outside the city and its control. The factors interact: former deputy secretary of administration and finance Eric Kriss maintained that because "everything was on tilt" in Chelsea, the respective impact of mismanagement and corruption "can't be disaggregated:"

Why was there mismanagement? There was mismanagement because you were told to hire someone's nephew. Why did you hire someone's nephew? Because you were told to. What was the reason you were told to hire someone's nephew? Because there was corruption in the system.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Interview, September 23, 1993. Kriss wrote the August 1991 *Statement of Findings*, which was silent on the issue of corruption; no indictments had yet been handed down from the state or federal investigations then in progress.

Nonetheless, an array of factors are isolated below for individual inspection with the understanding that they were re-aggregated by Chelsea's assorted constituencies into many different combinations with many different storylines.

### *The Corruption Theory*

The evidence of ingrained political corruption was undeniable. During the first two years of the receivership, the four most recent mayors of Chelsea were convicted on bribery and other charges, while three members of the Chelsea Police Department's vice squad faced federal indictments for extortion; other city officials also were slapped with state and federal charges. The cluster of indictments and one long court case aired sordid stories about illegal gambling, money-laundering, and drug distribution through a network of notorious local bars with the collusion of police officers who had persuasion and protection all the way up through the mayor's office.

Corruption may well have driven business out as well. Empty foundations for two proposed multi-million-dollar commercial development projects – an Anheuser-Busch regional distribution facility and a McDonald's franchise – seemed to provide silent testimony that they were driven out by never-ending demands for payoffs.<sup>57</sup> Spence lampooned the city's zoning and land-use provisions as phantom toll-booths with dishonest local officials as renegade toll-takers: "You say 'no, no, no' until the person gets the hint that they have to pay the regulatory authority. A lot of business walked away"

---

<sup>57</sup> Brian McGrory, "FBI Probing Pullouts in Chelsea; Why did beer, burger firms drop projects?" *Boston Globe*, November 21, 1992, p. 1 (Metro/Region).

from those demands.<sup>58</sup> The McCormack Institute governance report called this collection of extra-legal practices in the city "municipal racketeering," and one former state official close to the receivership decision priced Chelsea's "corruption premium" at a full 50 percent – that is, it was twice as expensive to do city business than it would have been otherwise.<sup>59</sup> A possible indicator of the normalization of corruption in Chelsea political culture was one elected official's candid answer to a question about what he might have done differently, had he been mayor before the receivership crisis: "I might have been in jail with the rest of them – I'm not gonna lie."

#### *The "Disorganized-Crime" Theory*

Spence consistently maintained in his public statements that Chelsea's voters were the victim of "a conspiracy by organized crime to take democratic rights away from the voters. In many ways, democracy was subverted 30 years ago in Chelsea, and the task of the receivership is to help to restore it."<sup>60</sup> Pervasive Mafia influence in the Chelsea police department has been documented as far back as the 1950s.<sup>61</sup> By the 1990s, however, the conviction and imprisonment of major Mob figures in Greater Boston had led to a series of clumsy and bloody internal struggles that investigators and investigative reporters

---

<sup>58</sup> Lecture at MIT, April 21, 1994.

<sup>59</sup> Hendrickson and Beard, *op. cit.* Eric Kriss, former Massachusetts assistant secretary of administration and finance, interview, September 23, 1993.

<sup>60</sup> From an interview of the WBUR radio program "The Connection" (hereafter referred to as "The Connection"), moderated by Christopher Lydon, December 15, 1994. Despite the pervasive nature of corruption in Chelsea City Hall, Spence and Carlin each claimed some measure of ignorance about the extent of the investigations and the level of corruption in the city they had been hired to repair. Carlin equivocated, first denying prior knowledge, then saying he had been briefed on it but that his role had focused narrowly on balancing Chelsea's books; nonetheless, he had an armed bodyguard. Spence maintained, "I didn't know Chelsea was a little Mob town. I had no idea" (interview, September 18, 1994).

<sup>61</sup> Vincent Teresa (with Thomas C. Renner), *My Life in the Mafia* (New York: Ballentine Publishing Group, 1974).

referred to "disorganized crime."<sup>62</sup> The vacuum left "various lieutenants...retailing" in the "backwater" of Chelsea, including a Chelsea bar-owner and convicted racketeer identified in 1998 as a long-standing Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) informant who had exchanged inside information for a presidential pardon as well as tacit permission to continue his other activities – thereby feeding the corruption that would help drag his city under.<sup>63</sup>

### *The Protected-Incompetence Theory*

There was plenty of material to support an argument that Chelsea's government was simply (or simultaneously) moribund, lazy, and backward – a paralyzed creature of slovenly habit. Receivership staff regaled interviewers with tales of the administrative debris they found in City Hall: shoeboxes in the treasurer's office with close to \$2 million in undeposited parking fines, a windfall wiped out by the unpaid bills literally stuffed in desk drawers throughout the building.<sup>64</sup> Massachusetts Department of Revenue files have preserved the wrinkled adding-machine tapes that the Chelsea city treasurer presented to Gov. Weld during one crucial meeting as the sole documentation of the city's cash flow – a performance, according to two state officials familiar with the sequence of events, that single-handedly persuaded

---

<sup>62</sup> Lower levels of competency permitted the first-ever FBI wire-tapping of a Mafia initiation ceremony, and also were displayed in botched hits among competitors.

<sup>63</sup> Ralph Ranalli, "Sources: Bookie pardoned by Reagan was Mob Informant," *Boston Herald*, June 2, 1998, p. 1; also by Ranalli, "Some say lucky Berkowitz may have been an FBI informant," p. 7. Additional quotes from Spence, MIT lecture, April 21, 1994. Berkowitz was known to carry his presidential pardon, signed by Ronald Reagan, in his wallet. While many of these relationships were laid out in court documents in the early 1990s, the full magnitude of Berkowitz's immunity did not become visible to the public until 1998.

<sup>64</sup> Stephen McGoldrick, interview, March 9, 1994; Sara Rimer, "A Fading Industrial Town Totters Toward Revival," *New York Times*, Saturday, December 24, 1994, p. 6.

the governor that it was time to take over the city.

Meanwhile, the city seemed frozen in time: no schools had been built since 1926, and of Massachusetts' 351 municipalities, Chelsea was the only one that never had taken advantage of the state's generous school-construction reimbursement formula, which would have provided a bonus percentage if used to decrease racial isolation in the city's schools.<sup>65</sup> The city had virtually no long-term debt because it had issued no bonds in at least two decades – and that was because it had not replaced its infrastructure or invested in any substantial new capital projects.

#### *The Futile-Boosterism Theory*

Despite all evidence to the contrary, the city persisted in unrequited boosterism that had prevailed since the construction of the Mystic-Tobin Bridge connecting Chelsea to downtown Boston in the 1940s. Unrealistic expectations pervaded the city's development plans: predictions of new office buildings and luxury residential towers along Chelsea Creek began in the 1950s, lingered through the 1970s, and took on new momentum from the waterfront development craze in Boston in the 1980s. Few of these prospects ever materialized.

Observers held rival explanations for the city's feeble and near-futile attempts

---

<sup>65</sup> After World War II, Massachusetts passed a school-building assistance bill that reimbursed districts for 65 percent of the cost of new construction; in the mid-1960s, reimbursement rose to 90 percent if the new building contributed to school desegregation. Chelsea had tapped neither of these resources. Stretching the time-line for effect, Sen. Birmingham observed that before receivership, "we hadn't built a new school in Chelsea since Roosevelt" – adding, after a studied pause, "Teddy Roosevelt" (Harvard Kennedy School of Government seminar, April 12, 1996).

at development. Some argued that development was deterred by the interaction between corruption and incompetence: either because politically-favored developers could not deliver, or because even bribery did not guarantee certainty in such a low-capacity system. Some maintained that the city's locational niche was far more problematic than its boosters realized, pointing out that many of the available parcels for redevelopment were brownfields of varying toxicities, requiring a decade or more of investment and millions of clean-up dollars before significant new uses could be contemplated.

*The "Those-People" Theory:  
Immigration & Demographic Changes*

A vocal set of citizens and elected officials located the source of Chelsea's troubles squarely in the city's low-income and immigrant populations, ascribing to them the primary responsibility for the city's descent into the pre-receivership crisis. Broadly characterizing this group as a dependent population sapping public resources, adherents to this view argued that the Latino and Asian immigrants (particularly undocumented aliens but also non-citizens) represented a fiscal and social burden on the city, even though welfare and other income-support programs were a state rather than a local function. Their purported link to Chelsea's decline and fall was drawn most vividly by one of the state's leading anti-tax activists, Barbara Anderson, who had been lead advocate for the Proposition 2 1/2 tax cap and other limited-government measures. Anderson explicitly identified Chelsea's "welfare population" as the single explanatory variable, saying, "The state government, which chose to make Massachusetts a 'welfare magnet,' picked



Chelsea to be the North Pole."<sup>66</sup>

As a corollary of these arguments, some outspoken aldermen and their supporters targeted the human-services agencies that filled many of the city's downtown storefronts, primarily serving low-income and immigrant clients. Because of their tax-exempt status, these non-profit agencies did not directly support the city's property-tax base, and their local critics accused them of draining the municipal treasury while feasting off of city services and government grants – a fistful of local, state, and federal tax dollars.<sup>67</sup> Also targeted were state and federal housing subsidies, blamed for the deterioration and overcrowding of Chelsea's housing stock and the influx of undesirable tenants. Even in the wake of an ongoing series of often-fatal house fires, low-income and immigrant tenants were more often the target of these sentiments than the negligent absentee landlords.

Local Latinos also were singled out as the source of the city's reputation as a major metropolitan drug transit point, a view that persisted even though it was white ethnic politicians and police officers who were in the process of being indicted as the city's bad actors. While there clearly was an active Latino presence in the inter-continental drug network and in street-level distribution, the Chelsea bars where the drugs were retailed, drug money was laundered, and illegal gambling enterprises flourished through the early 1990s were owned, controlled, and protected by members of other ethnic groups – "the wise guys among the previous immigrants," as Spence put it,

---

<sup>66</sup> Brian McGrory, "Bulger predicts OK on Receiver; Says He Won't Fight Chelsea Bill," *Boston Globe*, September 11, 1991, p. 27 (Metro/Region).

<sup>67</sup> These opinions often were articulated at Monday night Board of Aldermen's meetings or in ongoing debates via letter to the editor of the *Chelsea Record*.

noting that Chelsea's drug trade had "not just arriv[ed] with the Latinos."<sup>68</sup>

*The Suddenly-Strategic-Location Theory:*

*Logan Airport Expansion & Other Waterfront Development Plans*

One firmly-held belief in some quarters was that the state had declared a moratorium on home rule in Chelsea for geo-political reasons – or at least was taking the opportunity to gain control of the city's industrial waterfront for airport-related development. Over the previous decade, the aldermen and most mayors had resisted expansion of businesses such as park-and-fly lots, rental-car storage, and freight-forwarding depots.<sup>69</sup> The state transportation agencies' sudden interest in Chelsea's redevelopment activity, particularly along the waterfront, and the first receiver's unilateral changes in local zoning to welcome these vehicle-intensive airport-related activities sparked questions about the state's overall motives for imposing receivership.

Chelsea did have a strategic location a mile north of the Logan International Airport. The state was building a new network of roadways to better connect the airport to the regional highway system, and a new cross-harbor tunnel between the airport and the Boston mainland was almost completed.<sup>70</sup>

Logan's parent agency, the Massachusetts Port Authority (Massport), was initiating a \$2-billion modernization program to bring twice as many passengers through Logan by the year 2010. A virtual island bounded by Boston Harbor on three sides and the vigilant East Boston neighborhood

---

<sup>68</sup> Lecture at MIT, May 3, 1993.

<sup>69</sup> Some suspected that this opposition was part of the extortion routine, as well as a way of "kicking up dust" (Spence, MIT lecture, April 21, 1994) to mask those efforts.

<sup>70</sup> This project, known colloquially as the "Big Dig," represents largest federal infusion of highway dollars in the country. It also will bury the elevated highway that cut through downtown Boston in the 1950s.

along its western boundary, Logan had nowhere to grow – nowhere for the services to support the 40-million passengers or increased tons of air freight that Massport anticipated. Real-estate values at the mainland end of the new tunnel was escalating exponentially; land was much cheaper to the north of the airport, across the stagnant finger of Boston Harbor known as Chelsea Creek.

Chelsea Creek had been home to the petroleum industry since the turn of the twentieth century, its shores lined with oil depots. But the industry was changing its distribution patterns, and by the early 1990s, the tank farms were being mothballed and sold. A 1990 Massport study on this future of Chelsea Creek noted that none of that contaminated land could be used for most commercial or any residential uses before it was de-contaminated, a process that could take a decade or more by current methods.<sup>71</sup> While undergoing such environmental remediation, however, those sites could be sealed, blacktopped, and used for such low-end uses as vehicle storage – low-end but invaluable to a crowded airport desperate for parking space and just-in-time cargo deliveries.

### *The Boston University Contract Theory*

Because of Boston University's 1989 contract to run the Chelsea public schools, many suspected that BU president John Silber had an influential role in the state's takeover decision, to protect his institution's high-profile investment. BU was represented on the Ad Hoc Committee considering

---

<sup>71</sup> Massachusetts Port Authority, *Chelsea Creek Fuel Terminals (Boston, Chelsea and Revere, Massachusetts): Issues Confronting a Regional Resource*, October 1990 (study conducted by Comunitas, now Antonio Di Mambro & Associates, Boston).

alternatives for Chelsea's future in the summer of 1991, trying at one point to use the receivership bill to win legislative relief from bilingual- and special-education mandates. But university officials had quietly expanded their involvement from the schools into Chelsea City Hall, and BU opponents in the city considered this unsolicited and unpublicized cross-over into other areas of municipal management high-handed and invasive, charging that Silber was using his access on Beacon Hill to enlarge what they already considered his illegitimate mandate.

### *The Municipal Fiscal Stress Theory*

Some political and academic observers, and even some local voices, asserted that such a tiny city simply could not afford to survive as an independent entity, no matter how latently strategic its location. Chelsea had almost all the symptoms of the painful condition known as municipal fiscal stress: a shrinking tax base, full overhead costs for local services, inflationary public-employee contracts, and limits on local property-tax increases, which had been capped by state referendum in 1980. One of Chelsea's peculiarities is that, unlike other American cities in contemporaneous fiscal distress (such as Ecorse, Michigan), its financial crisis was not the result of a default on payments to bondholders, since it had issued no bonds in over two decades; nor had it made any infrastructure investments.<sup>72</sup>

Calling them a "recipe for fiscal disaster," the first Chelsea receiver, James Carlin, singled out escalating public-employee contracts as extortionate deals

---

<sup>72</sup> Ecorse is an industrial suburb less than a mile from Detroit, with a historically black community. Carlin bragged in a letter to Gov. Weld that it had taken him less than a year to accomplish what it had taken the Ecorse receiver six years to do; see Appendix A for additional details on the Ecorse experience and a comparison to Chelsea's circumstances.

holding the city budget captive to annual inflation; former assistant A&F secretary Kriss called them "predatory."<sup>73</sup> When annexation had loomed in the summer of 1991, regionalization of the public-safety departments and possibly other core services was advocated as a less extreme way to cut costs. However, these pronouncements represented to some loyal and defiant Chelseans (and their unions) a pyrrhic choice between death and dishonor.

One tactical variation on this theory was that state officials had made Chelsea – the smallest, handiest, and easiest of municipal targets – an object lesson for other cities whose accounting practices and property-tax revenues were similarly. In this reading, receivership had been imposed as a form of aversive therapy: in one observer's phrase, a way to get other municipalities to "self-correct." The governor's staff had produced a report for the governor's Ad Hoc Committee that described Chelsea as having a \$10-million "structural deficit" – a large number, particularly as a percentage of the city's \$40-million budget, set in an authoritative but undefined phrase suggesting that the yawning gap between the city's revenues and its expenditures was no casual problem.<sup>74</sup> Combined with the tangible fact of the schools not opening

---

<sup>73</sup> Interview, July 13, 1995; interview, September 23, 1993.

<sup>74</sup> Executive Office of Administration and Finance, *Statement of Findings, City of Chelsea*, August 1991. While not defining "structural deficit," the report used it repeatedly throughout the document, warning that the \$9.5-million deficit for FY92 was expected to widen in the following fiscal year and arguing that the "budget deficit is structural in nature: that is, it must be cured by substantial changes in the structure of government, revenue sources, and the delivery of services" (1, 6). One receivership staff member considered the \$9.5-million figure "overblown," but summarized the "structural" problems in pre-receivership Chelsea as "underpaid people, overpaid vendors,...crooked mayors, a ridiculous procurement process, [and] management [that] didn't know that they weren't solving some of their problems because people were being bribed to look the other way." Investigations into the inflated costs of the city's trash-hauling fees, insurance premiums, and outside legal services led to a flurry of indictments during the receivership period, including a former state representative, and significant savings to the city (interview, June 15, 1994). In retrospect, Spence's chief of staff, Stephen McGoldrick, estimated that in September 1991, the actual deficit stood at about \$2.5 million, while the \$10-million figure reflected all the requests for state aid from Chelsea

in September, these numbers quantified the crisis and seemed to demonstrate an unambiguous need for immediate action. But receivership's opponents (and even some of its supporters) questioned these numbers, regarding the \$10-million figure as an bureaucratic artifact more symbolic than real, meant to make the situation dire enough to warrant a trip to the emergency room from which the city's autonomy might never return.

*The Global Economic Restructuring Theory:  
Emphasizing the Macro*

From a long-term perspective, Chelsea was in the grip of an economic process out of its own control: the forces reshaping American cities through the spatial reorganization of industrial production in the US and globally.<sup>75</sup> Administrative incapacity and tainted decision-making may help explain why any one municipality failed to respond to changing economic circumstances, but the crucial fact remains that de-industrialization had created urban emergencies in the older industrial cities of New England and across the American manufacturing belt. The combination of industrial flight to cheaper labor markets – in suburban, Southern, and finally offshore locations – and white flight to suburban communities left fragile tax bases as well as increasingly impoverished, underemployed, and non-white populations in central cities, while downtowns stagnated.

Federal urban-renewal programs represented an earlier response to the same

---

(interview by Asha Ghosh, March 5, 2002).

<sup>75</sup> The foundation text still is *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry*, by Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison (New York: Basic Books, 1982). Much scholarly work has been done on the political economy of urban renewal from 1949 to 1973, when the federal program came to an end. See Appendix A.

root economic event, an organized campaign to retrofit declining industrial cities for the demands of a service-based economy. Chelsea had been the last American city to be admitted into the urban-renewal program, just after the 1973 fire, and many of its urban-renewal goals remained unmet: tracts of land still tagged with the parcel numbers of the Title I application almost two decades old lay untouched in 1991. The tasks awaiting the receiver could be seen as the unfinished business of urban renewal in Chelsea.<sup>76</sup>

*The Political-Opportunism Theory:  
Emphasizing the Micro*

Because of the constellation of political actors involved, a wide range of *ad-hominem* explanations were generated to account for the imposition of receivership in Chelsea. Theories blossomed about old animosities and grudge matches, about whether the various players were arrayed to act on the city's behalf or in their own interest. In these scenarios, political corruption, organized crime, and the city's "structural deficit" all were rationales used to initiate state takeover for other political purposes, primarily in service to individual political careers.

For example, many Chelsea partisans regarded the suspension of local democracy as a specific means to prevent former mayor James Mitchell from regaining his seat in Chelsea City Hall, and simultaneously to block the political progress of other members of one local faction, all under the putative protective cover of "fighting corruption." At the same time, others cast Gov. Weld as a former federal prosecutor with his own professional agenda in Chelsea: to go after the wise guys left behind when he failed, as US Attorney,

---

<sup>76</sup> See Appendix A for more on parallels between urban renewal and municipal receivership.

to bring all his organized-crime targets down.<sup>77</sup>

Alternatively, rumors of an anticipated Weld run for the US Senate gave him reason to be seeking a high-profile crisis intervention and presumed fiscal-discipline success story as good material on the campaign trail – perhaps good enough to put him on 1992 vice-presidential short-lists. A variation on that theme saw Weld, an ideologically flexible Republican, craftily forging an alliance with the conservative wing of the state Democratic party, even embracing his Democratic opponent in the bitter 1990 gubernatorial race, BU president John Silber, perhaps to deter a re-match.<sup>78</sup> Meanwhile, according to a different set of conjectures, Silber himself might have been trying to ride the BU experiment to the White House or to fulfill his aspirations somewhere on the national stage.

The two members of the city's state legislative delegation also were subject to such speculation. For such a tiny municipality, Chelsea had an extraordinarily powerful political team on Beacon Hill, both high-ranking Democrats in a Democrat-controlled legislature: state representative Richard Voke was Assistant Majority Whip and looking to move up to the speaker's position, state senator Thomas Birmingham had risen through the ranks with

---

<sup>77</sup> Weld's biggest target was former Boston mayor Kevin White, but he could not assemble enough evidence for an indictment, despite tying White to the underworld through his chief fundraiser, who was prosecuted for illegal fundraising activities.

<sup>78</sup> By the end of his tenure in the governor's office, Weld had appointed powerful conservative Democrats to an array of key state posts: installing former state senate president William Bulger as chancellor of the University of Massachusetts system, Silber as chair of the State Board of Education, and James Carlin as the first Chelsea receiver. Weld's secretary of transportation and construction, James Kerasiotes (and Carlin's sponsor), was another veteran of deep and longstanding political feuds fought between liberal and conservative wings of the state Democratic party for the previous 20 years. Whether Weld's bi-partisan alliances were to be regarded as cooperation, cooptation, or mere inconsistency remained an open question.



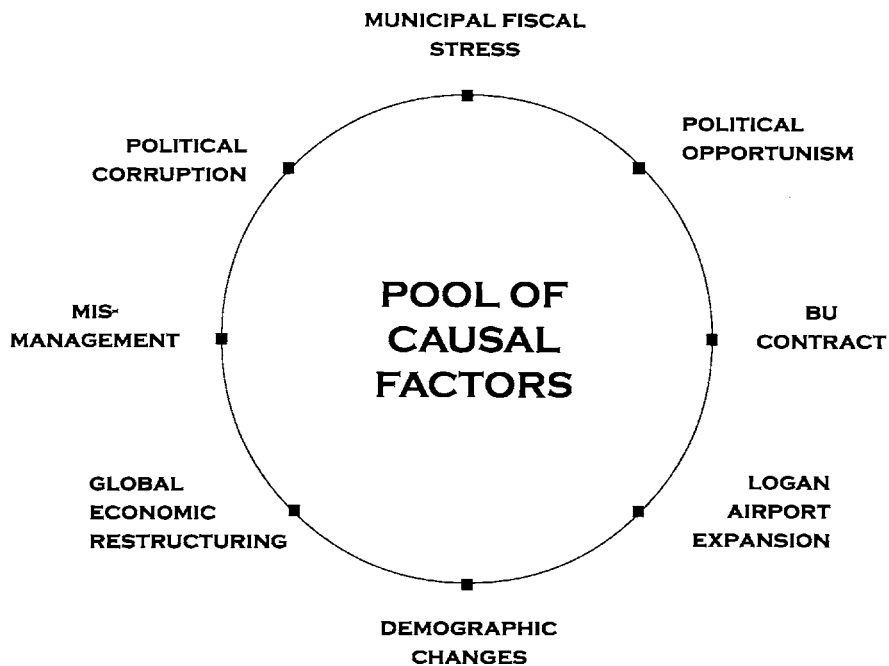
remarkable speed to chair the Ways & Means Committee – "pound for pound," as Carlin said, "square mile for square mile," the city had "more clout than anywhere else" in the state.<sup>79</sup> Both elected officials had advocated receivership as the least worst option; subsequently, the amount of state resources steered into the city during the receivership period was significant, ranging from a new state office building to Massachusetts-backed bonds for new schools to receivership staff paid by the Commonwealth. Two incompatible alternate theories arose about their role, motives, and status: either that they were a target of a Republican governor's efforts to embarrass and undermine two powerful Democrats early in his first term, or that they had used receivership as a way for them to control the outcome and consolidate their own power. An additional commentary came from a different analytic perspective: that because of their standing in the legislature, they were able to shield Chelsea from the consequences of its dysfunction for far too long.

---

<sup>79</sup> Interview, July 13, 1995.



## THEORIES OF RESPONSIBILITY: BUILDING AN INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS



**Fig. 2.1** – Derived from interviews, observations at public meetings, and other accounts of the pre-receivership crisis, these causal factors form a pool of possible explanatory variables for Chelsea's pre-receivership crisis, the city's demise, and the intervention chosen. Different constituencies, and different narrators within those constituencies, combined these causal factors in a wide variety of hypothetical scenarios.



### *"Theories of Responsibility" & Institutional Analysis*

The causal factors presented in the previous section form a pool of possible explanatory variables for the pre-receivership crisis, the city's demise and the intervention chosen (see Fig. 2.1). As the charter-drafting process unfolded, different constituencies – and different narrators within those constituencies – combined these factors in a wide variety of hypothetical scenarios depicting the onset, rationale, and purpose of receivership. Identifying the roles of key institutions in these scenarios, they weighed factors differently, gave them different levels of credence, subjected them to varying levels of scrutiny and testing. While often highly speculative, assembling these causal factors into scenarios is a constructivistic response to data exchanged in a volatile environment with multiple constituencies who have long- and short-term objectives and assorted tactics for accomplishing them (and blocking others). These scenarios each created a context for interpreting action during the receivership, an interpretive grid with which each constituency greeted the charter-drafting process and which was in turn reinforced or transformed by new data.

While some scenarios may seem more plausible (or less fantastic) than others and some at the outer limits of conspiratorial divination, each of these scenarios represents – and should be regarded as – an institutional analysis, often quite sophisticated, complete with the normative and causal explanations that Cobb calls "theories of responsibility" (1994):

"Theories of responsibility" are accounts which "show...[one person] as an agent[;] an action[;] and [the other] as recipient of that action, as well as a

causal link between the action of the agent and the harm the [other] has suffered" (1994:165).

In the formal legal setting of the courtroom, "theories of responsibility" are advanced by rules of evidence and arguments "about who did what to whom and why," and responsibility is assigned deductively; alternative quasi-legal procedures such as mediation are geared more toward the interruption of mutual blaming and restorative rather than punitive forms of justice ([1994:166]). In a planning context, these theories are projected into the future to include not only what has been suffered (or enjoyed) in the past but what might be suffered (or enjoyed) in the future as a result of previous and/or proposed actions, as well as what restitution for prior injuries or mitigation of prospective injuries or negative impacts that might result from a given action.<sup>80</sup> In any of these settings, however, the establishment (or refutation) of cause or blame in a context of harm or disadvantage lies at the heart of the scenario. Thus "theories of responsibility" are a central analytic tool, combining factors of causality in an institutional process.

For example, the assorted theories about Gov. Weld's motives in imposing receivership in Chelsea could be dismissed as an offhand set of political inferences ranging from the unverifiable to the near-irresponsible. But examined more carefully, they are a cluster of causal analyses, involving intent, strategy, and an institutional structure within and through which the governor could exert leverage. They are narrative explanations fundamentally concerned with power and how it is manifested, through

---

<sup>80</sup> Mazza describes planning as "anthropologically committed to the future" (Mandelbaum *et al.* 1996:6), and narrative encountered in a planning context often have that implicit commitment, as they pertain to or even dramatize future prospects.

what institutional vehicles it is exercised, and how that power can be countermanded. These narratives carry within them maps of the political territory, the narrator's navigational instruments, and they should be recognized as that narrator's institutional analysis of the Chelsea crisis and the state's intervention. They may be speculative, but they are vehicles for a constructivistic analysis of the institutional environment and the prospects of future action in that environment.

*Speculation:  
Constructivist or "Destructive"?*

In her own case study of the CPT's work, mediator Susan Podziba provides an example of underestimating this analytic process – in this case, on the part of constituencies hostile to the charter-drafting process (and later opponents of the charter itself).<sup>81</sup> Writing from a social-capital perspective, she is particularly critical of what she calls "destructive speculation" and emphasizes skepticism as a barrier to social-capital production:

Skepticism is likely to be present in all communities, but its depth and tenacity are likely to be greater in communities like Chelsea, with lesser amounts of social capital to draw from. Skepticism limits the possibilities of public creation. In response, process experts or mediators must design processes to identify the individuals who serve as the repositories of the public trust and educate those individuals about the process and its assumptions so that they can educate the community. Mediators and other involved professionals must give legitimate and consistent messages to limit destructive speculation (1998:24).<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> *Social Capital Formation, Public-Building and Public Mediation: The Chelsea Charter Consensus Process* (Dayton OH: Kettering Foundation, 1998; see Appendix D for additional detail.

<sup>82</sup> "Public creation," or the engagement of private citizens as public actors in a deliberative process, is part of the vocabulary of "public-building" and public-sector mediation. See Appendix D for more extended definitions of these terms.

This description of skepticism suggests its dangers to the mediation process from Podziba's professional perspective, particularly when the one-two punch of skepticism and speculation contributes to the failure of mediation or "limits the possibilities of public creation."

Both terms need to be examined more closely, however. Skepticism and speculation occur when a participant (or an observer) combines selective data to produce a plausible scenario of what another player, community, or institution has already done, has the opportunity and the wherewithal to do, or is likely to do. Even though the adjective most closely associated with skepticism is "healthy," Podziba does not address the circumstances in which skepticism might be appropriate, nor the consequences of being susceptible to skepticism's opposite: the state of credulity, even gullibility, resulting from a lack of experience, misplaced trust, and/or inadequate critical analysis. Some degree of skepticism is an experience-based, mature response to new information weighed against the interpretation of prior information – a reflective reminder to check one's enthusiasms, antagonisms, and sources.

Even so, Podziba automatically associates this sense-making process with "destructive speculation." While a valid point about a pernicious problem, exactly when speculation becomes "destructive" should be estimated with great care. Separated from the judgmental adjective "destructive," speculation is a search for the "real" story, the "real" decision-making and who is "really" involved in that, the "real" costs and benefits of a particular outcome (and who bears the costs or enjoys the benefits). One party's speculation may infer the workings of some shadow process that has not been revealed openly, and



from that inference lead to a damaging hypothesis: for instance, that the CPT meetings were merely a ritual in advance of a foregone conclusion, which would undermine the credibility of the process – or in Podziba's case, lead to the assumption that all charter opposition was spurious rather than a potentially genuine expression of democratic concern or disagreement.

Speculation is not only inevitable but also necessary in the flow of political action, where "information is interpretive, incomplete, and strategically withheld" (Stone 1988:21), and where both participants and observers are in a constant iterative process of testing information against a prior context. This is not an irrational but in fact a highly rational process, although it may be limited by an unwillingness to test data or to allow new information to raise new questions about old theories. Nonetheless, a planner reacting reflexively to dismiss such analysis as "destructive" risks neglecting a powerful data source and perhaps important feedback on the process itself. Podziba's warning that "[m]ediators and other involved professionals must give legitimate...messages to limit destructive speculation" assumes that the mediator has won legitimacy in the mediation process, inside and outside the meeting room. A public participation process, however, is an ongoing "struggle for legitimacy [and] the area for this struggle is discourse" (Cobb 1994:181).

**AFTER THE FALL:  
OVERVIEW OF THE RECEIVERSHIP**

Under the terms of the receivership legislation, a receiver to be named by the governor would replace the mayor for a period of up to five years, with sweeping powers by which to achieve the statutory mission: to deliver a balanced budget, a new city charter, and a viable city sometime before the fall of 1996. Two appointees with very different personal styles – and different interpretations of their vast mandate – occupied the receiver's office over the next four-and-a-half years. Tapping none of the 42 applicants for the position, Gov. Weld first installed James F. Carlin, a successful entrepreneur and conservative Democrat with prior experience in state government. Chelsea's public-employee unions were acutely aware of the fact that as Massachusetts transportation secretary in the early 1980s, Carlin was in charge of the state's public-transit authority when it ran out of money and shut down for a day; in response, he cut overtime, bus routes, and jobs, and then raised fares. True to form, Carlin in Chelsea focused narrowly on expenses and revenues: he cut city services, fired city employees, altered public-employee contracts (and fought the firefighters' union in court, successfully), landed a new state office building in an unimproved urban-renewal site, pushed through the siting of a controversial medical-waste business, and removed zoning restrictions barring airport-related businesses on Chelsea's industrial waterfront – a move that the aldermen had resisted fiercely for a decade.

Vowing to remain in the job only a year, Carlin in turn recruited Lewis H. "Harry" Spence as his deputy for day-to-day operations and presumptive heir. Spence had pursued the receiver's post and had been listed in press reports as

a short-listed candidate on the strength of his idiosyncratic expertise: he had operated Boston's public housing authority while it was held in court-ordered receivership in the early 1980s. Although he had clashed with public-housing tenants over a policy to evict families of any resident convicted of a drug-related crime, Spence emerged from that post with a wide reputation as not only an effective institutional firefighter but also a progressive and gifted public-sector manager. He also was regarded as one of Boston's most articulate public intellectuals. Briefly in real estate and then at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, Spence had trekked to an Indian ashram for mid-career contemplation. Temperamentally and philosophically, the two hardly could have been more different. Nonetheless, Spence came on as deputy receiver with the understanding that if, as Carlin put it, "he worked his ass off," he would be recommended as Carlin's successor, and for the following nine months they were what one reporter dubbed Chelsea's "managerial odd couple."<sup>83</sup>

*Carlin in Chelsea:  
September 1991-July 1992*

At first glance, Carlin was a curious choice of troubleshooter for Gov. Weld to dispatch to Chelsea, especially since he hadn't even applied for the job. A conservative Democrat who had served two cabinet positions under the like-minded former Democratic Gov. Edward J. King, first as commerce secretary (credited with the thumbs-up "Make It in Massachusetts" bumpersticker) and then as secretary of transportation and construction, Carlin had returned to the private sector to continue a very successful business career. It was the

---

<sup>83</sup> Interview, James Carlin, July 13, 1995; Brian McGrory, "How to Save a City," *Boston Globe Magazine*, June 28, 1992, p. 12.

King administration's transportation brotherhood that brought him back into state government as a dollar-a-year executive-on-assignment: another King-era associate, James Kerasiotes, now in Carlin's old job as state transportation secretary, recommended him to Weld, who pushed aside all the other resumé's to hire Carlin.<sup>84</sup>

The new receiver defined a narrow, time-limited agenda. To Carlin, the question of dependent and independent variables in Chelsea's decline could be left to the academics: whatever the origin of the problem, the receiver was there to clear the mis-managers out of Chelsea City Hall, and the historical roots of the deadwood were of little interest or utility to the man with the buzz-saw. His primary mission and measure of success was the bottom line, whose greatest threat was ineptitude:

I...felt that, as a general statement, that the managers in the various city departments were either...incompetent, corrupt, or lazy. There were exceptions, but as a general statement, they were either one of the three. They were either incompetent, corrupt, or lazy and to the extent that I could clean the whole bunch of them out and get them off the city payroll, I felt that was important.<sup>85</sup>

He brought a bottom-line atmosphere into an environment where

---

<sup>84</sup> Carlin and Kerasiotes were steeped in Massachusetts transportation politics, which had been the locus of some of the most public and bloody battles between the liberal and conservative wings of the state Democratic party since the late 1960s. King had been Massport director in the 1960s and early 1970s during its expansionist era, until the anti-airport movement – championed by Michael Dukakis and a cluster of policy activists in the Kevin White administration whose faces would remain in Massachusetts politics for a generation – brought Logan's moving boundary to a standstill and helped install Dukakis in the governor's office. When the Dukakis majority gained control of the Massport board and fired him in 1974, King's revenge was to take on Dukakis and win the governor's race in 1978, only to lose the grudge match in 1982. The cluster of faces re-assembling in Chelsea were familiar, albeit under the ægis of a Republican administration.

<sup>85</sup> Interview, July 13, 1995.

accountability had been eroded to near-extinction. On the other hand, he had no patience for procedural niceties. According to one of the principals in a controversial deal to build a Massachusetts Port Authority garage on the Chelsea waterfront, Carlin had pounded out the agreement on at his office typewriter, not even passing it on to his zoning administrator: "That was the zoning application, the public hearing, and the appeal."<sup>86</sup> After Carlin had left the city, one local political activist contrasted the first receiver with his successor: "Carlin did the rough work, and Harry is the finish carpenter."<sup>87</sup>

Carlin's sometimes brutal candor was a powerful tool: when Carlin told 400 residents packed into the Chelsea High School gymnasium, "This receivership is lousy, I don't want to be here, and you shouldn't want me to be here," the previously hostile crowd applauded, shouting down a group of heckling firefighters ("Mr. Carlin, you ever see a house burn down?") whose contract was one of Carlin's major targets.<sup>88</sup> On the firefighters' unwillingness to close any fire stations in the two-square-mile city or to cut back on the unlimited-sick-leave provisions that created massive overtime costs, he told an interviewer, "It's nuts, it's nuts, it's just nuts."<sup>89</sup> His refusal to mince words endowed him with an essential trustworthiness, although one interviewee with a practiced eye warned that there was an element of calculation in the pose: "Carlin...will pretend to be transparent as part of his shrewdness, his ability to convince you that he's just an open bluff – you know, [that] what you see is what you get."

---

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Mark White, March 3, 1999.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Alexander Nappan, December 10, 1994.

<sup>88</sup> Chelsea Cable Television (CCTV) videotape, October 31, 1991, where he also pronounced it "goddamn crazy that no one at the police station can answer the phone that speaks Spanish."

<sup>89</sup> Interview, July 13, 1995.

Carlin's brief career in Chelsea City Hall burnished his *persona* as a can-do guy and a straight-shooter, although one published account of his year in Chelsea described his style as "ready, shoot, aim."<sup>90</sup> A self-made millionaire, Carlin was a firm believer in both the limitations of government and its primary role in promoting economic growth – and then getting out of the way. In many respects, his credo was consonant with the politics of the more conservative Chelsea constituents, including some of the fiercest opponents of state intervention; except for the nature of Carlin's new job in Chelsea, they spoke much the same political language.

#### *The "Managerial Odd Couple"*

Spence had had two immediate roles as deputy: manager of daily operations and diplomatic emissary for his undiplomatic boss. Carlin had hired him not only to supervise the details but "to do the things [Carlin] would not do, to think the thoughts [Carlin] would not think" – and, by implication, to talk to the constituencies Carlin didn't have the time or patience to talk to.<sup>91</sup> Carlin disclaimed any active role for the receiver in changing the balance of power in the city:

I didn't feel that my job was social engineering and to bring the Hispanics into the mainstream and to do a lot of this stuff. I mean, which I think is all good. Do you follow me? I think that's fine. I wasn't opposed to that happening, but I didn't feel it was on my short list of things that I had to do to get out.<sup>92</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> McGrory, "How to Save a City," *op. cit.*

<sup>91</sup> McGrory, "How to Save a City," *op. cit.* By implication, this last category included not only the Latino community but also the Board of Aldermen, who now served in a strictly advisory capacity: McGrory noted that while "Spence sits with the aldermen; Carlin had done so twice, once to tell them he was cutting their pay, another time by mistake, when he went to see who was making all that noise upstairs."

<sup>92</sup> Interview, July 13, 1995.

Carlin made one effort to appease the Latino leadership with a clumsy offer of patronage, then alienated the same constituency with a particularly vivid gesture: not only firing Spence's selection for an assistant receiver for human services (former Massachusetts welfare commissioner Carmen Canino, also a prominent Latina), but eliminating the new position entirely.<sup>93</sup> Toward the end of his tenure, he made a controversial public statement that immigrants who come to live in Chelsea should "learn the language and obey the law," as though they would do neither without being reminded.<sup>94</sup>

Spence came close to leaving Chelsea City Hall himself over the Canino incident, even issuing bitter farewells to some colleagues, although he ultimately remained on Carlin's staff. When he became receiver, he spoke a very different language from his predecessor, openly acknowledging the Chelsea political system's historical "barrier to penetration by the new [*i.e.*, Latino] community."<sup>95</sup> He knew the numbers: that in 1991, when the official count of the city's Hispanic population had at least doubled to over 30 percent, only one out of 16 elected officials was Hispanic and less than 10 out of 300 city employees, with one black officer in a police force of 65 and no Latinos.<sup>96</sup> Spence translated, bluntly and sympathetically, the "message" that

---

<sup>93</sup> After an initial conversation with Spence about being a potential candidate for a new Office of Community Service, Vega discovered that Carlin had named him publicly to the position without a formal offer, a full job description, or Vega's own acceptance. In a letter to Spence, he subsequently declined the position because of its "markings of tokenism," in the interim taking a staff position at Chelsea's Commission on Hispanic Affairs. "Vega Declines City Hall Position," *Chelsea Record*, February 19, 1992 (no byline). When Spence became receiver, he created the position and hired Aura Sanchez-Garfunkel for the post.

<sup>94</sup> McGrory, "How to Save a City," *op. cit.*

<sup>95</sup> Lecture at MIT, May 3, 1993.

<sup>96</sup> Lecture at MIT, May 3, 1993.

these numbers carried: " 'This government is not yours.' "<sup>97</sup>

Even so, his relationship with the Latino community could not be described as unproblematic. Some were wary of Spence because of the controversial policy he had instituted at the Boston Housing Authority (BHA) to evict families whose members were convicted of drug offenses, and a similar issue quickly arose in Chelsea. In April 1992 the receiver's office received a \$1-million federal grant to implement a "Weed and Seed" anti-drug program "aim[ing] to 'weed' out criminals and drug-dealing and 'seed' the community with housing, education, and drug-treatment programs," and Spence was one of its vocal promoters.<sup>98</sup> The Weed and Seed methodology depended not only on local police work but also on the regular involvement of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). Chelsea's Commission on Hispanic Affairs was apprehensive that the INS would target undocumented aliens more broadly, and that young Latino distributors would be more susceptible as the program's targets (and valuable to its statistics showing success) rather than the large-scale drug suppliers, whether Latino or Anglo. "The concern here is that there is too much weeding and not too much seeding, to put it bluntly," Chelsea School Committee member and Hispanic Commission president Marta Rosa told the *Christian Science Monitor*, adding, "If you bring the INS in, you're going to have a community that's not trusting the project."<sup>99</sup>

With that as prologue, Spence developed a somewhat testy relationship with

---

<sup>97</sup> Lecture at MIT, May 3, 1993. According to Gastón Institute figures (Rivera in Meléndez and Uriarte, eds., 1996), the count probably was closer to ten percentage-points higher; Spence also acknowledged the undercount.

<sup>98</sup> Elizabeth Ross, "Fiscal Crisis Continues for Older Cities Like Chelsea, Mass.," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 14, 1992, p. 7.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*



the Commission. Although he respected Vega, the group's articulate and effective community organizer who became alderman in the first election held under receivership, mutual antagonism sprang up between Spence and Rosa. After the Commission filed a federal complaint in December 1993 over the treatment of Chelsea students at the regional vocational-technical school, Spence's relationship with the organization deteriorated rapidly; the suit named the city as well as the regional school district, but the Commission had not warned Spence or consulted with him, even though he had been trying to broker the issue more informally.<sup>100</sup> Mistrustful of the Commission's leadership and impatient with the group's community-organizing strategies, Spence turned toward other Latino organizations and individuals he regarded as more moderate and less confrontational.<sup>101</sup>

At a more abstract level of analysis, however, Spence framed receivership itself as a way "to deal with the challenges [of] diversity in this culture," a "peculiarly American improvisation" that was a result of the failure or refusal of other institutions to respond to issues of race.<sup>102</sup> He linked it directly to racial and ethnic change in Chelsea, which was undergoing its "second great wave" of in-migration in the 1980s, accompanied by the longer-term out-migration of the city's white residents. Reserving his harshest judgment for the part of the "Anglo political establishment reflecting the turn-of-the-century" generation of immigrants, he accused them of exploiting

---

<sup>100</sup> Indira A. R. Lakshmanan, "Chelsea Hispanics Charge Bias; Say White Pupils More Likely To Get into Vocational School," *Boston Globe*, December 3, 1993, p. 33 (Metro/Region); Marta Rosa, interview, April 6, 1995.

<sup>101</sup> This more middle-class bloc, identified with the Latin American Cultural Association (LACA), was generally supportive of the BU contract as well as the receivership. From that segment of the community, Spence hired Jesse Guevara, husband of moderate alderman Letitia Ortiz, as his personnel director.

<sup>102</sup> Lecture at MIT, May 3, 1993.

a "politics of nostalgia:" they "see the demographics change...and they are out of here," with a "savagely cynical perspective" that allowed them to "steal the doorknobs on the way out, take everything they [could] get" – a practice another observer referred to as "patrimonial kleptomania."<sup>103</sup> Calling these attitudes a consequence of "the realities of race in American politics," Spence argued that in the case of Chelsea these consequences were fatal, because "the politics of Chelsea were so corrupt that the system collapsed."<sup>104</sup>

Because corruption also had effectively excluded many white Chelseans, Spence described the city as having "two kinds of residents: disenfranchised and disinherited."<sup>105</sup> While acknowledging that most Latinos considered themselves unwelcome in the Chelsea political system, Spence identified a seeming contradiction: that many members of the white community "already view[ed] themselves as fundamentally defeated," arguing, "What reads to Latino community as an adamant holding-on" was in fact "an expression of no longer being invested."<sup>106</sup> He sketched two profiles of alienated Anglos: those driven from political engagement by the fear of the dangerously corrupt "minority of a minority" in City Hall, and those driven into destructive political engagement by what he described as a working-class logic of universal mistrust and a defensive xenophobia against the city's new constituencies. To the new immigrant communities, the grip of these players on the city's daily political life reflected a simple unwillingness to share power. But Spence saw the paradoxical inverse, arguing that a substantial white bloc in "the city identifie[d] itself as utterly powerless and incapable,"

---

<sup>103</sup> Roberta Miller, interview, July 7, 1994.

<sup>104</sup> Lecture at MIT, April 21, 1994.

<sup>105</sup> Lecture at MIT, May 3, 1993.

<sup>106</sup> Lecture at MIT, May 3, 1993.

reverting to a

victimization statement that "we always get screwed." The only person with power is the [one with the] power to say "no," so you say "no" to everything... "We're not sure when we're being snookered, we're probably being lied to when a deal comes to town, and that's [*i.e.*, saying 'no' is] the only way to make sure you're not being suckered."<sup>107</sup>

This combination of Latino isolation and Anglo alienation troubled Spence, and even when touting the early achievements of the receivership, including \$250 million in new investment of public and private capital, he shocked a rapt MIT audience by suddenly asking aloud, "Why do I have this intuitive feeling in the pit of my stomach that we're doing it all wrong?"

The community is deeply divided, there's no shared vision, I have all the authority in thing world to bring in things with no ownership. It's the fundamentally wrong approach. Receivership exists through the end of next year, I can renew it at will twice after that, to 1996 on the outside, two-and-a-half years max....There's this whole program of development, but even with the nice liberal stuff Harry talks about, how does [the city genuinely] recover, making this Chelsea's own economic revitalization?<sup>108</sup>

An hour's conversation with a group of planners, academics, and graduate student left Spence to struggle with a question for which he hoped the charter and the charter-drafting process would provide the answer: "How do we get to the point where the people of Chelsea feel profound ownership?"<sup>109</sup>

*Spence: The Social-Capital Broker*

With this question apparently in mind, Spence took up the cause of restoring

---

<sup>107</sup> Lecture at MIT, April 21, 1994.

<sup>108</sup> Lecture at MIT, May 3, 1993.

<sup>109</sup> Lecture at MIT, May 3, 1993.

the city's supply of social capital along with its supply of working capital. He presided over such practical (and historic) measures as Chelsea's foray into the New York bond markets for money to build new schools citywide. But over his three-and-a-half-year tenure as receiver, Spence's focus was largely procedural, ambassadorial, and what might be characterized as inspirational, with a new emphasis on civic tasks. His language drenched in community-building terms, he located the role of the receiver not just in an economic process but in a larger social process, to be measured at his departure by "to what extent [there is] indigenous leadership, besides what is being investigated by the Department of Justice, so that when [I] walk out, [I] don't create a political vacuum."<sup>110</sup> He used his final State of the City address as an occasion to talk about government as a "spiritual" activity:

Contrary to the conventional wisdom, government and politics are not a game or a sport or a business or even an occupation. The practice of government, rightly understood, is a spiritual practice. Through its practice, we are forced to confront our own egos and ambitions. In its practice, we are called on to enlarge ourselves; called on to be larger, even, than the circle of our friends and neighbors, larger than our tribe or clan, larger than our own generation or social class. We are called to break bread with all of those who make up our community – as in every tradition, God calls us to be larger than our presupposed definition of ourselves. And only if we break the snares of our egos and our ambitions, can we succeed in building out of our isolated and fearful selves a strong and competent community. It's often painful and always demanding, but it's the only thing truly worth doing.<sup>111</sup>

With this as his mission statement, Spence chose to shoulder a number of tasks his predecessor avoided – for example, presiding over a protracted public process of school-siting disputes rather than siting new schools unilaterally. Perhaps most in contrast to the political style of his predecessor,

---

<sup>110</sup> Lecture at MIT, May 3, 1993.

<sup>111</sup> "State of the City Address," *Chelsea Record*, January 14, 1994, pp. 8-9.

however, was Spence's approach to Chelsea's new city charter. Instead of submitting to the governor the draft charter Carlin had commissioned from a former city manager or writing a new one himself, Spence set up a charter-drafting committee and referendum, as part of a process of gradual and didactic process of restoring political authority to local political bodies.

## QUIZ

1. From what you have read so far, who are the important characters in this story? Who has power? Who has legitimacy? How has that been established?
2. What institutions – material or otherwise – have been presented as important, legitimate, questionable? What institutions give different characters their status and legitimacy? What undercuts that status, or that legitimacy?
3. When does the history of Chelsea begin? When does the history of Chelsea's decline begin? When does the history of Chelsea's loss of autonomy begin?
4. What do you, as reader, know about the narrator of this chapter? Who is the narrator? Who is addressing you now in the second-person – so intimately, so imperatively – as "you"? What questions do you have for the narrator?
5. What, or who, might have been left out of the story so far?

The following section starts the story again. The same questions apply.

**"TIRES STACKED IN THE HALLWAYS OF CIVILIZATION:"  
OTHER CHELSEA HISTORIES**

"Yes, Your Honor, there are rodents,"  
said the landlord to the judge,  
"but I let the tenant  
have a cat. Besides,  
he stacks his tires  
in the hallway."

The tenant confessed  
in stuttering English:  
"Yes, Your Honor,  
I am from El Salvador,  
and I put my tires  
in the hallway."

The judge puffed up  
his robes  
like a black bird  
shaking off rain:  
"Tires out of the hallway!  
You don't live in a jungle anymore. This  
is a civilized country."

So the defendant was ordered  
to remove his tires  
from the hallways of civilization,  
and allowed to keep the cat.

**Martín Espada,  
"Tires Stacked in the Hallways of Civilization,"  
from *City of Coughing and Dead Radiators* (1993),  
read on National Public Radio, April 9, 1994**

If told chronologically from the time of European arrival in Massachusetts Bay, Chelsea histories tend to represent the Latino community as if cast in a long-running theater production in a walk-on role with few speaking lines.

From another perspective, however, Latino history in Chelsea is even older than the first English squatter settlement on the waterfront tract of land Native Americans called Winnisimmet in the early eighteenth century. Instead, it could be said to date from the European conquest of the Caribbean in the late fifteenth century and the colonial relationships that since have endured, shaping the relationships and migratory patterns between the US mainland and the Caribbean archipelago as well as Central and Latin America. Yet in most accounts, it is as though each Puerto Rican, Dominican, El Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Colombian, and other Latino immigrant arrived in Chelsea in an individual econometric act of self-advancement, without a history and without a place in the city's history except as an artifact of "demographic transition."<sup>112</sup> Since the first three Puerto Rican families formed the nucleus of a diasporic Caribbean "island" in Chelsea in the mid-1950s, the Latino and white communities of Chelsea have inhabited separate histories, almost as though they inhabited different cities.<sup>113</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup> The same is true of the city's Southeast Asian arrivals, who were greeted with amnesiac suspicion, absent a sense of historical responsibility for the US role in the Vietnam War and its spillover into Cambodia and Laos (and forgetful of which refugees fled from nations that were former allies in that conflict).

<sup>113</sup> Puerto Rican migration to the American mainland began in earnest in the 1950s, in response to what one economic historian calls the "perpetual failure" of a policy of industrial development known as "Operation Bootstrap" imposed on the island by the US Congress. The resulting disruption of the agricultural economy made migration to the New York and other employment centers on the mainland seem a promising option, and by the end of the 1950s there were 400,000 Puerto Ricans on the East Coast, although almost as many returned as emigrated annually. See Fernandez (1996) and Dietz (1986). In fact, Puerto Rican officials and the Massachusetts Department of Employment Security started working together on recruitment in the 1940s for agricultural labor in the state, and later for industrial labor. A fuller historical sketch of the Latino community in Boston describes this linkage: "Latin Americans are tied to the United States by a web of historic relations framed by the uneven economic development of the hemisphere and the myriad interventions of the North in the affairs of the South in pursuit of its own economic, political, and military objectives...[A] colonial relationship of almost a century frames the flow of Puerto Ricans to the continental US...This colonial relationship which began at the turn of the century, following the Spanish American War [when the US wrested Puerto Rico from the Spanish], is characterized by massive North



According to a 1976 study conducted by Boston University sociology students, *A View From Under the Bridge: A Plan for Hispanics in Chelsea*, "There is almost no written material that deals with the Spanish-speaking population in Chelsea" (Beltran *et al.* 1976:21); the report also identified only one moribund Latino community organization. By 1994, the city's Latino population had grown and diversified in its origins, built a network of social-service agencies, educational and youth-oriented groups, cultural institutions, and political associations, including a former city commission which had seceded from Chelsea City Hall and become a free-standing non-profit advocacy organization, publishing its own bilingual monthly newspaper. At the time of the charter-drafting process, Latino activists were still describing their work as a struggle for legitimacy and against invisibility.

There were ways in which the city's Latino population literally was not accounted for. Official statistics showed 154 percent change in Latino population in Chelsea between 1980 and 1990 (total at 31.4 percent of population; Rivera 1991:11), but even that figure of significant growth is likely to represent an undercount. According to Gastón Institute analyses of the 1990 federal census and the 1995 state census,

[t]he undercount of Massachusetts Latinos in the 1990 Census seems particularly severe in Chelsea and Boston. The 1990 Census reports only 9,018 Latinos in

---

American capital investment in the industrialization of Puerto Rico, the destruction of the agricultural economy of the island and the displacement of Puerto Rican workers due to capital-intensive industrialization. This economic dislocation has resulted in the massive migration of Puerto Ricans to the mainland since World War II, and, in many cases, to the back-and-forth circulation of Puerto Rican workers between the island and the mainland in search of employment." Miren Uriarte, PhD, "*Contra Viento Y Marea (Against All Odds): Latinos Build Community in Boston*," in *Latinos in Boston: Confronting Poverty, Building Community*, Boston Persistent Poverty Project, The Boston Foundation, November 1993, pp. 6-7.

Chelsea, or 31.4 percent of the city population. Estimates of the Latino community produced by other sources, however, suggest a significantly larger community. Figures developed by the Center for Community Planning at the University of Massachusetts at Boston show 11,800 to 12,700 Latinos in Chelsea, or 44 percent of the total population (Rivera 1991:2).<sup>114</sup>

Even with low figures, however, the face of Chelsea was changing rapidly: in 1980, less than 20 percent of Chelsea residents were people of color, but by 1990 that percentage, combined with the growing Asian population in the city, stood at 41 percent (Rivera 1991:7). By 1995, the number of Latino residents in Chelsea had increased officially to 12,135, or 38.6 percent – one of six cities that had seen at least a 25-percent rise in Latino population during that five-year period (Torres & Chavez 1998:3).

Numerical recognition, however, is only one layer of acknowledgment. Other important dimensions remained largely obscured and undifferentiated:

The Latino community is very mixed, very diverse within itself, which is sort of a barrier to organizing, because we are so diverse language-wise. We don't all

---

<sup>114</sup> By 1990, Latinos were a significant presence in Massachusetts: the number of "Latinos in Commonwealth doubled in size from 1970 to 1980 and again between 1980 and 1990, and they are now the largest minority group in the state" (Rivera 1991:6). The rate of growth between 1970 and 1980 was 113.2 percent and between 1980 and 1990 was 104 percent, almost twice the growth rate of Latinos nationwide, 53 percent (Rivera 1991:4). In the winter of 1994, as the charter-drafting process got underway, a headline in the "Largest Minority" series in the *Boston Globe* read, "Political clout still eluding Hispanics" (Don Aucoin, January 21, 1994, p.1 [Metro/Region]); the series also reported that there were only five Latino judges on the bench statewide (Lynda Gorov, "Disproportionate Few Are Hispanics in Judges' Chambers," *Boston Globe*, February 20, 1994, p. 37 [Metro/Region]), and that Massachusetts had the highest rate of Hispanic poverty in the nation (Efrain Hernandez, "Hispanics Grow in Numbers, and Concerns," *Boston Globe*, January 20, 1994, p.1 [Metro/Region]). In 1993, the Gastón Institute still identified an "'information gap' on Latinos in the state" (Rivera in Melendez & Uriarte 1993:38, quoting Uriarte 1990): "This information gap is the lack of basic information and analysis of the problems and needs of this population. Data readily available for whites and blacks is often non-existent for Latinos. This gap 'extends from...the participation and outcomes for Latinos in public programs, such as employment and education programs,...to the understanding of the complex dynamics of Latino communities in the State' (Uriarte 1990:3)."

speak the same Spanish, even. We don't all eat the same foods, so culture and language... Although everybody says, "Oh, you're all Hispanics," that's not true... [D]epending on what generation Hispanic, depending on where your roots are, depending on whether you were born here or you've been migrating back and forth to Puerto Rico for the last 10 years of your life, you're in a totally different political plateau coming in... So that's what some of the barriers are to bringing in the Latino community fully into power.<sup>115</sup>

In early April 1994, as the Chelsea charter-drafting process entered its first stages of public controversy, Espada read "Tires in the Hallways of Civilization" from his book *City of Coughing and Dead Radiators* on National Public Radio, the judge welcoming the Salvadoran tenant into a "civilized country" which overlooks the responsibility of landlords to rodent control but not tires in the hallway.

It would be more accurate to describe Chelsea during the receivership period as the home of two separate diasporas, the result of population flows both in and out of the city. For the recent swell of Latino immigrants, their leap was geographical, from one continent to another, or from an island to the mainland, and sometimes in cyclical patterns between the two. For many longtime Chelsea residents of European descent, however, it was the city itself that transformed around them in ways they barely, rarely could control: besides the long-term trend of industrial decline, the influx of predominantly non-white immigrants changed the face of the city while the ongoing white outflow to the suburbs continued to drain friends, families, and familiar constituencies. Fiercely attached to a city of memory that barely existed (or never may have existed outside of that memory) in actual physical and social terms, some native Chelseans became a diaspora in time, while the newest

---

<sup>115</sup> Marta Rosa, interview, April 6, 1995.

generation of immigrants formed a diaspora in space. Planning theorist Leonie Sandercock has captured the tension between these dual diasporas, in which "ambivalent new communities are thrust together with anxiously nostalgic old ones...," often blind to the parallels in their experience and so mutually uncomprehending (1997:6).<sup>116</sup> Sandercock's distinction applies almost seamlessly to Chelsea in the 1990s: the "ambivalent new communities," primarily Latino, for whom the city was a terminus of uncertain welcome, and those in the "anxiously nostalgic" sector of the white ethnic community that had never left the city (or who had left and returned no less committed to a historically static perspective).

Among many Chelsea natives, two common emblems of nostalgia and anxiety cast Chelsea as a helpless serial victim of fate on the one hand and of politics on the other: the catastrophic fires of 1908 and 1973, and the Mystic-Tobin Bridge, its footings in both Chelsea and Charlestown, the symbol and agent of a paradoxical disconnection from Boston. The bridge represented for many longtime Chelsea residents a daily humiliation. When it was built in the 1940s to replace a drawbridge to Boston across the Mystic River, Chelsea had taken pride in the towering structure, which allowed cargo ships free passage to the piers along the river's outfall in the northwestern corner of Boston Harbor. But the bridge's footings had cut a long swath through a residential neighborhood, and its off-ramps dumped fast-moving traffic, much of it heavy trucks en route to Logan or the Chelsea produce markets, onto local streets. In addition, residents and city planners soon realized that rather than connecting Chelsea to downtown Boston and the region, the

---

<sup>116</sup> There is being a stranger in a strange land, and there is being a local resident confronted with a wave of strangers – simultaneously mutual anxiety and incomprehension; over time, the landscape becomes familiar to the stranger and unfamiliar to the local resident.

bridge allowed commuters – and the regional imagination – to bypass Chelsea altogether and left the city even more isolated, with a lingering sense of being no more than a suburban convenience. Adding injury to insult, a public-health study in the 1970s confirmed that lead paint flaking off the bridge was poisoning Chelsea children, but the public agency that owned and operated the bridge, the Massachusetts Port Authority, had been slow to undertake a lead-paint removal program. Perhaps the crowning indignity of living under the bridge was the other detritus that came down from above: litter, even dirty diapers, carelessly thrown from car windows into the adjacent but functionally imperceptible backyards below.

Often cited in receivership-era editorials or in public addresses invoking the city's history, the bridge and the two fires ostensibly invoked Chelsea's indomitable spirit to survive – the phoenix forever rising from the ashes. At the same time, these precedents implicitly foreshadowed receivership, as though fire, infrastructure alignment, and state takeover all were acts of spontaneous combustion. At the same time, the bridge served as an example of the city's betrayal and invasion not only by higher levels of government but also by political actors within Chelsea itself, elected and appointed officials who made deals and misled the city about the consequences of so-called progress and modernization. From this perspective flowed a profound defensiveness that fed an oppositional stance, composed equally of pride and prejudice, against all comers: not just immigrants but also state-appointed receivership staff (and academic researchers).

In the Latino community, however, these historical touchstones were – other than the lead paint – pre-historic, since immigration from Puerto Rico did

not begin until the 1950s, long after the first Chelsea fire and soon after the construction of the bridge. Much of the Latino population did not arrive until after 1973, and a significant proportion was not even born before the second Chelsea fire. The defining moments in the Latino history of Chelsea were of necessity more recent, but they also were related directly to the struggle to overcome outsider status. Instead of being presented as catastrophes beyond human control, the watershed events in the Latino chronicle were institutional and thus actively political gestures: organizing the first city-sanctioned quasi-annual Latin American Festival in 1974; the founding of the Mayor's Commission on Hispanic Affairs in 1986 under Mayor Nolan, then taking it into exile from City Hall and re-incorporating it as Chelsea's Commission on Hispanic Affairs in 1989, with clear mandate to organize against the Boston University contract to run the Chelsea public schools. Rather than the incursion of the Mystic River bridge and the false promise of urban renewal, it was the terms of the BU contract that Latino activists regarded as the quintessential anti-democratic affront to their community, and the subsequent election of the first Latino to the Chelsea School Committee later that same year as their seminal democratic response, after years of electoral defeat. References to BU, to its presence in the schools, or the contract carried this historical weight, as did what many still regarded as the Latino community's fragile electoral hold, with one representative on the six-member school committee and two on the nine-member Board of Aldermen.

No one in Chelsea was neutral on the 1989 BU contract as a radical privatization experiment: supporters saw it as the heroic application of expertise to a failed public enterprise while opponents regarded it as an anti-democratic takeover of an undeniably troubled public institution and its

vulnerable population.<sup>117</sup> Chelsea's Commission on Hispanic Affairs and the Massachusetts Federation of Teachers had challenged the contract in court on state constitutional grounds and charged that BU not only had been improperly exempted from the open-meeting and open-record laws, as well as collective-bargaining statutes, but also intended to starve the bilingual-education program – in a school system already more than 70 percent Latino and serving an immigrant population. The lawsuits, ultimately unsuccessful, percolated through the judicial system over the course of the receivership, while anti-BU activists pressed on other fronts. The ongoing hostilities were not soothed by the irascible and authoritarian BU president Silber, whose views of teachers' unions, bilingual education, and parent involvement in school management were all equally dismissive and combative.

The BU controversy had profound political effects on Chelsea's Latino community, effectively serving as a political catalyst that propelled the first Latino electoral successes. Buoyed by a wave of outrage, Hispanic Commission president Rosa became Chelsea's first Latino elected official in 1989, winning a seat on the School Committee member in the city elections

---

<sup>117</sup> The university's track record was uneven during its first several years. When the dean of the BU School of Education stepped down as acting superintendent in February 1992, he boasted that test scores were up, the drop-out rate was down, and college admissions were rising. But September 1992 figures showed lower test scores than when BU took over in 1989, and according to one published report, "Scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test have fallen, teacher absenteeism is up and the dropout rate is still above 50 percent" ("An Experiment in Urban Education Stumbles," *New York Times* (Associated Press byline), September 6, 1991, p. 47. By the time of the charter process, parents, teachers, Latino activists, and other advocates had wrangled with four superintendents. An evaluation at the halfway point in BU's contract in June 1994 gave the university "mixed marks," citing professional development for teachers and the early-childhood-education initiative as successes but noting high turnover of personnel and short-lived programs, little net change in test scores, neglect of the high-school cohort, and bitter relationships with the Latino community (Amy Sessler, "BU Earns Mixed Marks After 5 Years in Chelsea," *Boston Globe*, June 12, 1994, p. 1 [North Weekly]). See also the highly critical May 1994 report of the state Department of Education's Chelsea Oversight Panel.

that came six months after the BU contract had been signed. A long-time activist who never had pursued public office, Rosa said that attending a meeting of the BU Management Team – which had no local representation and provided no forum for community input at a given meeting – had induced her to run, and she remained on the School Committee even after it had been pre-empted by receivership.<sup>118</sup>

The BU experience also had a direct effect on the politics of receivership as well as the charter-reform effort: because of the political organizing associated with BU's presence in the Chelsea schools, Latino activists had been mobilized rapidly and understood the role they could play as receivership approached. According to alderman Juan Vega, also a community organizer for the Commission, when the Finance Control Board (FCB) refused to accept the July 1991 Chelsea budget for the impending fiscal year,

red flags were going up, and we sent a delegation to the State House to find out what was going on. Through our network there, we knew something's coming down the line...We had a meeting with [A&F secretary Peter] Nessen. Marta got put on the A&F [Ad Hoc] committee, [because] we were the only ones from Chelsea in the State House...We had a record: we did heavy voter registration, we beat up BU, we were camping out in [Rep.] Voke's and [Sen.] Birmingham's offices...Marta came back [from the Ad Hoc Committee meetings] saying, "Those people are talking annexation." So we started an anti-annexation campaign...Receivership by comparison seemed to look okay...Voke and Birmingham [had] muscled through the special legislation for BU [in 1989, so] we understood real well what role they would be playing. That's who we were after, camping out in Voke's office. We had dealt with them on bilingual stuff, established a routine for us and our membership, we knew that we had to go sit with them. When receivership came up, we knew we had to do it again, get on these guys' cases again. It was normal for us.<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>118</sup> Interview with Marta Rosa, April 6, 1995.

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Juan Vega, March 2, 1994.



The one Chelsea citizen on Ad Hoc Committee was Marta Rosa. When the receiver came to Chelsea, however, the Latino community had few avenues into the new regime in City Hall; as Vega noted, "We knew through our contacts every move on [the establishment of] receivership, but once it was in, there is this whole other part that remains mysterious: [the deals made with] Massport, [the ongoing role of] the governor's office."<sup>120</sup>

Against this backdrop, the new charter would present the first opportunity for structural change in school governance since the BU takeover, and the charter-drafting process would present a forum for addressing democratic control of school governance, much the way the CPT's city-manager and city-council debates referenced the democratic deficits leading to receivership. The positions of partisans on each side of the BU issue were predictable: supporters wanted the existing structure of the Chelsea School Committee (and perhaps its sympathetic incumbent majority) reinforced to protect the contract from concentrations of district-level resistance, particularly in primarily Latino precincts; opponents wanted a structure with new ventilation systems.

Until the charter-drafting process began, BU and its controversies were outside the receiver's ministerial portfolio. From the perspective of a receiver arriving in Chelsea in 1991, the city's public schools presented a cluster of three distinct tasks: day-to-day administration, construction of new school facilities citywide, and permanent governance to be set by the terms of the new charter. Because of BU's role, direct daily management of the Chelsea schools was out of any receiver's hands, vastly simplifying his job by limiting

---

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

his tasks to the arenas of school governance and new-school construction. The charter would address future school governance; the receiver's office, with a windfall of state funding, would have direct responsibility for the school system's new physical infrastructure.

Both state officials and the two receivers freely described the school-construction program in terms of a public spectacle with meanings beyond the city limits. Once built, the new high and middle schools – along with the new Department of Revenue facility – would be visible from the elevated state highway that carried Boston commuters over the city and across Boston Harbor twice every business day. In literally changing the Chelsea skyline, city and state officials hoped that these sites would signal that Chelsea had become a place where things get built, advertising the city's future and screening its past. In addition, for the city to consummate a substantial bond issue was the financial markets' seal of approval, of which the buildings were proof. The new schools also promised an indirect contribution to expanding tax base, as a material sign of lasting transformation – while not newly taxable properties, they represented the prospective creation of an expanding tax base by attracting middle-class families who might see a fresh educational asset for their children. BU president Silber had predicted 5000 new residents in a controversial lecture on Chelsea's future.<sup>121</sup>

The new schools had an additional meaning to anti-BU activists: it converged with the BU contract to reinforce the limits of pre-receivership exclusion, to shield a school system from which they now felt doubly distanced, to which

---

<sup>121</sup> "The Diversity of Chelsea: A Crucible for the American Dream," Alfred E. Kahn Memorial Lecture, March 27, 1989.

their political access now seemed doubly denied. In their eyes, the new schools would be open to Chelsea's children, but to parents and other advocates, the school system would remain as closed as it had been before charter reform; and if low-income residents were pushed out by rising real-estate market, they would not be able to take advantage of any of the physical and educational improvements to schools. This produced a political paradox: Spence and the Latino leadership were positioned as allies on school-siting controversies, but as antagonists on the new charter's provisions for school governance. While backing the new schools and largely supporting Spence's negotiated settlements over particular sites, Latino activists were frustrated by the prospect of new schools to which they had no more political access than before receivership.

In retrospect, Rosa saw the BU contract as a premonitory gesture not of urban recovery but of a larger, long-term disinvestment by the city's political establishment that began in earnest with abandonment of the schools:

[W]hen BU took over the schools,... we began to see...the beginnings of the city giving up in taking care of itself, with letting BU come and man the schools. There was a disinvestment of a whole lot of people in the community because they no longer controlled these schools... I think that's when the bottom started falling out, even though people couldn't look at it that way. People tend to think that in '90 or '91 [Chelsea went into crisis]... it didn't start [then]. I think it started with giving up on the schools, and giving up on the changing demographics, giving up on the new people of Chelsea. You know, there was a sense of, I think, loss for those who had been in power for along time, and with that sense of loss there wasn't a way out, so to speak, as to, "So who's going to take our place?" The new faces on site were not the faces that the old guard wanted to take over, so therefore there hadn't been a transfer of power, which I think caused the chaos that you finally saw, or contributed to the chaos that we finally saw in the early 90's.<sup>122</sup>

---

<sup>122</sup> Interview, April 6, 1995.

Whether the city was rising or falling; whether receivership signified a crowning indignity or no more under-representation than usual; whether the BU contract stood for an abandonment of the city's new citizens, an invasion by arrogant power-brokers in search of a kingdom with no regulatory constraints, or the best prospect for institutional improvements in the Chelsea educational system; whether the new schools themselves represented a long-overdue investment in the city's neglected infrastructure or the first step in a gentrification process that would displace the residents who would not share in Chelsea's good times – these all were plausible scenarios to the who promulgated them, assembled from a pool of causal factors drawn from a collection of data points: news, rumor, the public theater of community meetings, networks of sources, each with its own fragments of information. each with its own point of origin, each with its own end-point, which then reflects new meaning back on the beginning.

### III. CASE HISTORY

#### *Introduction: Re-Writing the Rules of the Game*

Conflict over who would rule Chelsea and how arose in many public arenas over the course of the receivership. The reconstitution of Chelsea's municipal government was one of the receiver's central tasks, and would shape the political space for the next political generation. As a protracted explicit struggle over the distribution of power in Chelsea, the charter-drafting process was a self-conscious constitutional moment in the city's political life, when definitions of citizenship and legitimate democratic representation were surfaced and articulated. If one purpose of receivership had been to interrupt the patterns of Chelsea politics, then it fell to the new charter to establish in the most explicit terms how differently Chelsea City Hall would operate after the receiver left, and who would have adequate representation in and political access to the new municipal government.

Writing a city charter may seem a dry – even dull – and dispassionate exercise, far from the heat of urban politics. But few things are more self-consciously political than changing the rules of the game.<sup>123</sup> A city's charter sets the architecture of its acknowledged political space, and the mechanics of municipal government are the structural skeleton for any configuration of local power. Whether to install an appointed city manager or an elected mayor as chief executive officer, the number and distribution of city councilors, district or citywide representation for the school committee, the

---

<sup>123</sup> Zoning codes are another set of rules that rise to the same level of systemic intervention and gamesmanship. See Riesman, *Rules of the Game* (unpublished masters thesis), Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Department of Urban Studies & Planning, 1990.

regulatory and review powers of the various boards and commissions, and who appoints them – these choices lay out the formal decision paths, shape the character of political representation for various constituencies, and identify the rungs of the ladder for individual political careers. At the same time, a city's formal governmental organization generates its institutional mirror image in the informal avenues of influence. Each of these virtual flow-charts came under explicit scrutiny in the charter-drafting process.

The new city charter was the formal public answer to the question of who would rule Chelsea, and the charter-development process from October 1993 to June 1994 was the focal point of a highly, often raucously public discussion about the conduct of politics in Chelsea: a debate, both candid and coded, about how the game was played in the past and in what ways it would change. The charter-drafting committee's sessions were animated and sometimes inflamed by conflicting assessments of the city's existing political structure and its political culture as a whole – what, if anything, was wrong and therefore what, if anything, was needed to fix it. These assessments surfaced in the committee's debates over both proposed charter language and the structural elements of a new form of government, and they found further expression in the proposed solutions. The subsequent referendum on the draft charter provided an even more public arena for the passions generated by these conflicting views of Chelsea's past as well as its future. The implementation of the new charter's central provisions – the first City Council election, including an unexpected twist in the results, and the hiring of the first city manager – tested the new rules and affirmed the new terms, written and unwritten, of the city's political culture.

Active resistance to the proposed charter came from two radically distinct constituencies. Public accusations that the charter was, in one alderman's scathing words, a "done deal" – that the basic outcome was predetermined by the receiver and that the charter-drafting group had no real discretion over the charter's key features – fueled the opposition that later mounted a "Vote No" campaign against the charter during the referendum. Opposition to the proposed charter, however, was not a unified field. Where the organized Vote No constituency saw too much advantage for the Latino community embedded in new charter, Chelsea's Commission on Hispanic Affairs – the predominant Latino community-organizing vehicle in the city – did not see enough structural change in the document to provide improved political representation or access for its constituency, particularly to governance of the Chelsea schools. Political mirror images, the two sets of opponents were unable to join forces or mount successful opposition independently during the referendum campaign, and the charter was approved by a comfortable margin. The Case Analysis in Chapter VI will examine in detail the political and narrative contest between and among these multiple sets of antagonists.

### *Map of the Chapter*

The chapter opens with a detailed description of the overall charter-drafting process between February and June 1994, highlighting the debates over its key elements: adoption of the city-manager form of government and the composition of the new City Council and School Committee. The next section chronicles the referendum battle itself. The chapter closes with the first two tests of the charter: the controversy over seating a new city councilor after an unanticipated vacancy and the selection of the first Chelsea city manager.

## OVERVIEW OF THE CHARTER-DRAFTING PROCESS

The obligation to deliver a new Chelsea city charter to the legislature by June 30, 1994, was among the receiver's most specific and explicit assignments. Ordinarily, a Massachusetts municipality undergoing a full-blown charter rewrite must follow an elaborate statutory procedure that includes an elected charter commission and a referendum to ratify the new charter before it goes to the State House for approval. Because of the extraordinary circumstances of receivership and the language of Chapter 200, however, the receiver had a free hand to draft and submit a new charter for Chelsea without any requirements for public input or participation. Carlin had contracted the job out to a consultant, himself a former Cambridge city manager, who produced a draft charter embracing the council/manager form of government, eliminating the mayoralty except as a ceremonial office, and silent on the existence of a school committee.<sup>124</sup> Carlin circulated the draft among some senior staff but did not proceed as far as submitting it to the legislature, and when Spence took over the receiver's job, he tabled it in favor of a modified public process for generating a new charter. The Carlin-era document later resurfaced during the referendum campaign, however, giving it a new role later in the "social drama."

Unlike his process-averse predecessor, Spence regarded charter revision as an opportunity for an elaborate public conversation about Chelsea's future. In December 1992, Spence set aside Carlin's draft charter and announced that

---

<sup>124</sup> James Sullivan of HMS Marketing also was a former executive director of the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce.



even though Chapter 200 had superseded the usual procedures, he would deliver a charter proposal to the state legislature only after local input and review, including a referendum to endorse or reject the product. Moreover, rather than generating the charter proposal out of the receiver's office, he intended to design a public process using alternative dispute-resolution techniques rather than an elected charter commission. His rationale was to downplay electoral politics, at least at the outset: instead of the competitive campaigning associated with an elected charter commission, he would hire a new consultant to manage a participatory consensus-building process for assembling the new charter with the help of an appointed local committee. The draft language then would go before the Chelsea electorate for ratification before the receiver forwarded it to the legislature for approval. Spence took pride in this hybrid model, seeing it as a way to introduce a new kind of public deliberation into Chelsea politics and to avoid the city's deep electoral ruts, at least until the referendum stage of the process.<sup>125</sup>

Out of three proposals from mediation specialists, Spence chose the submission of Susan Podziba & Associates, a consultant team with two professional mediators and a specialist on municipal charters.<sup>126</sup> Podziba outlined a seven-month process beginning with presentations to 55 community organizations and a citywide public forum as well as meetings in each of the city's five wards.<sup>127</sup> A mail-back survey would be distributed to the

---

<sup>125</sup> Interview, June 4, 1994.

<sup>126</sup> Proposals also came from Michael Wheeler *et al.* at the Program on Negotiation (PON), as well as Edmund Beard *et al.* at the University of Massachusetts at Boston's McCormack Institute of Public Affairs. Beard had co-authored the 1993 study critiquing Chelsea's current governmental structure and recommending conversion to a council-manager form. Podziba's team included Roberta Miller as facilitator and Mark Morse as a city-charter expert. Podziba had trained at MIT's Department of Urban Studies & Planning with Lawrence Susskind.

<sup>127</sup> In documents distributed about the charter, including "What We Said – A Summary of the

city's households, based on the most current voting lists. To solicit additional local opinion in preparation for the actual drafting of the charter, the consultants would conduct interviews with about 40 "community leaders" who would be asked, among other things, to nominate candidates for an appointed – rather than an elected – Charter Preparation Team (CPT), which would operate on the consensus model under Podziba's direction. Local residents also would be trained as facilitators to conduct additional meetings with local organizations. In addition, Podziba proposed hosting a call-in show on Chelsea's cable television station and establishing a "charter hotline" number at City Hall. The consultants then would assemble a short version of the data collected from these sources and mail it in newsletter form to all residents. To bookend the process of community consultation, Podziba pledged to bring the draft proposal back to the same community organizations and public forums before the June referendum.

From the 70 candidates nominated for the CPT by the interviewees, at the public meetings, and via the call-in cable shows or the charter hotline in City Hall (including self-nominations), a smaller group of about 20 were selected. The receiver then added two members of the receivership staff as well as the city's assessing director; the president of the Board of Aldermen tapped three of his colleagues (later filling in himself after one alderman resigned from the charter committee), and the School Committee had one representative, as did the state Secretary for Administration and Finance, represented across bureaucratic lines by Executive Office of Communities and Development (EOCD) staffer Marilyn Contreas, because of her expertise with charter

---

Community's Input" (Susan Podziba & Associates, February 15, 1994), Podziba estimated that they had reached 410 people through those meetings ; others considered that number inflated by the double-counting of anyone who attended more than one meeting.

commissions.

The resulting group was a demographic stew. Spence's representatives were his public-affairs director Nadine Mironchuk and assessing director Howard Dixon, both Chelsea natives, as well as his chief of staff Stephen McGoldrick, a street-wise municipal-government [maven] from Somerville, a nearby city with a history of similar economic and demographic stresses as well as a history of reform in the 1980s. The three original aldermen included the moderate Latina chair of the board's Governance Committee, Letitia Ortiz; Asa Hubner, successor to his father's aldermanic seat; and former police officer Robert Shoemaker. Although Hubner, in an improvisational act of civil disobedience, had set up a purple desk in a City Hall corridor in October 1992 to protest his board's displacement by receivership, he gradually became an enthusiastic charter supporter, while Shoemaker ultimately quit the CPT. The Chelsea School Committee's emissary was member Anthony (known universally, and accurately, as "Chubby") Tiro, a former football coach at Chelsea High School and an ambivalent supporter of both the BU contract and state-held receivership.

The balance of the CPT was composed of Chelsea residents:

- ◆ Joan Langsam, Somerville city solicitor and resident of Admirals Hill, the condominium development on the site of the former Chelsea Naval Hospital;
- ◆ Barbara Weston, a public-health nurse and also a resident of Admirals Hill;
- ◆ Charles MacFarlane, Chelsea's harbormaster who was equally savvy on

the city's streets, where he helped prevent gang activity from escalating;

- ◆ Dom Pegnato, an even-tempered former alderman who became the charter's foremost unpaid advocate;
- ◆ Bruce Mauch, vice-president of the Chelsea Clock Co. and a member of the Chelsea Excise Board, who resigned just before the end of the charter-drafting process;
- ◆ John Hoadley, director of local substance-abuse group Care About Now (CAN);
- ◆ Vincente (Tito) Avellaneda, Argentine owner of a successful downtown bakery and involved in Latino cultural activities;
- ◆ Angel (Tito) Rosa, Puerto Rican community organizer for Chelsea's Commission on Hispanic Affairs and husband of School Committee member Marta Rosa;
- ◆ Carolyn Boumila-Agostino, an activist in the Latino community with a mixed Lithuanian, Italian, and Latino heritage, a member of the Chelsea Excise Board and a recently unsuccessful candidate for ward alderman<sup>128</sup>;
- ◆ Gwendolyn Robinson-Cofer, the committee's only black member, also elevated by Spence to be chair of the Planning Commission;
- ◆ Marlene Demko, a schools activist who was a strong supporter of the BU contract;
- ◆ Helen Ularich, a devout Baptist who brought her religious beliefs to bear on some of the charter issues, particularly the Christian deity's place in the preamble; and
- ◆ Helen Zucco from Chelsea Neighborhood Housing Services, who resigned after regular absenteeism.

---

<sup>128</sup> Then fiancé (and later spouse) of Ward 1 alderman Juan Vega.

Although the original configuration of the committee included a seat for the Cambodian community, no representative appeared to claim it, and no sustained effort was made to fill it. By the end, a total of five nominees had resigned or not participated; not all of them were replaced.

The CPT then faced a grueling schedule of weekly meetings, alternating between the full team and a smaller working group every other Tuesday night in the Chelsea Public Library, in a basement room lined with formal photographic portraits of the city's elected officials since the prior charter had taken effect in 1911. These stern, white – and, with one exception, male – faces were proper witnesses to the rewriting of the city's foundation document, representative as they were of the city's shifting demographics between the turn of the nineteenth century and the middle of the twentieth: the Yankees giving way to the Irish, the Italians, and the Jews. They also testified to the persistence of certain Chelsea names through the political generations: the Vokes, the Quigleys, the Pressmans. At the same time, the striations of pipes across the low ceiling made the room look like the heart of the city's waterworks instead of the center of its communal reconstruction.

It was the receiver's intent that the consensus decision-making process for itself would be the medium for this transformation. Spence believed the consensus model – as a political process that explicitly pressures each member to weigh principled opposition against group progress, driving the group back to further discussion until consensus can be reached – would interrupt the pre-receivership Hobbesian brawl of all-against-all to which the city was accustomed. Before being seated on the charter committee, a CPT nominee had to declare a "willingness to learn about and operate by consensus," and

after being briefed at its preliminary meeting on input gathered by consultant team and issues of local governance, the group "negotiated ground rules" by which the group would conduct its discussion in the context of consensus.<sup>129</sup>

In her own case study, mediator Podziba later explained the mechanism and its ripple effects as a deliberative tool in a group process:

The use of a consensus decision-making rule rather than a simple majority rule greatly contributed to the Charter Preparation Team's ability to deliberate. In a simple majority situation, as much as 49 percent of a group can be blocked from having their concerns met. Over time, these 49 percent [sic] are likely to stop participating as they realize that such a forum does not provide adequate opportunities to satisfy their concerns. In a consensus situation, each participant must listen carefully and work to understand the interests and concerns of the others because all must participate in the consensus. A participant's lack of consent to a proposal effectively vetoes that proposal and triggers additional deliberation until a consensus emerges.<sup>130</sup>

However, the group's customized ground rules had one important variant from the "pure" consensus model:

For the Chelsea Process, because of time constraints, the Team adopted consensus as their decision-making rule, but if a topic was fully discussed and it appeared there was no way to reach consensus, the mediator was empowered to call for a vote on that particular issue. The package of decisions that was the complete charter, however, had to be adopted by a true consensus of the Team. A vote could carry with 80 percent of the Team in support.<sup>131</sup>

The 80-percent rule left room for the mediator to intervene in a deadlocked situation and call for a vote, which could pass only by "supermajority."

---

<sup>129</sup> Susan L. Podziba, *Social Capital Formation, Public-Building and Public Mediation: The Chelsea Charter Consensus Process*, Kettering Foundation, 1998 (capitalizations as in the original text), pp. 11, 12.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.* p. 31.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

Providing the mediator with extra leverage, this rule introduced the explicit use of her discretion and the warning that she would wield it as a last resort.

The whole exhaustive process was sketched out in cartoon form on poster board, and Podziba always opened meetings with this visual reference to "where we had been, we are, and where we are going." While a common technique in group process, the ritual of the chart over time took on the tone of kindergarten teachers leading a game in which the rules always were being explained again for children who cannot quite remember them. After the few sessions, some CPT members began groaning when the chart came out, and at the last marathon meeting in May, some threatened – only half-jokingly – to take it away and burn it. Besides the normal wear-and-tear of a grueling public process, the jokes pointed to underlying questions about the validity and transparency of the mediation process: to suspicions, from across the political spectrum, that the CPT was being shown the formal rules of the game when the charter in fact was being driven by informal processes not illustrated or acknowledged on the chart.

## NEW RULES FOR CHELSEA CITY HALL

The first issue on the CPT's agenda was fundamental: whether the charter would mandate a shift to a new form of government. To state interveners, the well-documented managerial lapses of local officials before receivership seemed to provide incontrovertible evidence of the city's need for professional administration. By the time the charter-drafting process was underway, it was not hard to argue that Chelsea politics were deeply ingrained with patterns of both mismanagement and corruption at the top, and that where the federal prosecutors and state-appointed receivers left off, a trained and credentialed chief executive officer should step in. However, it proved to be a divisive issue.

### *Changing the Game: From Mayor to City Manager*

Establishing recognized professional prerequisites for the job was one obvious strategy; changing the reward system was another. To eliminate the mayor's job would dash any alderman's or school committee member's further political ambitions at the municipal level, taking away the brass ring for which many of the city's current and former elected officials had been reaching throughout their careers. Indeed, some of the city's political actors were convinced that the shift to a city manager was a partisan move to block their respective interests in gaining – or in Mitchell's case, regaining – the mayor's office. At one of the first CPT meetings, aldermanic president Paul Nowicki, himself a young man of Polish extraction, highlighted this free-floating anxiety about Chelsea reverting to an unchanged charter after



receivership, joking, "I say we go back to [having] a mayor and three aldermen, and they all have to be Polish and related."<sup>132</sup>

The specific personalities in Chelsea politics and the potential effect of any structural opportunities for political advantage were never far from the surface of the CPT's discussions, which often revolved around multiple interpretations of who the new rules would benefit and how. As the CPT moved into the questions of a residency requirement and professional qualifications for the city manager, the group engaged in discussion – sometimes open, sometimes oblique, and often heated – reviewing the past performances of Chelsea's political actors and anticipating their future roles. At issue were a series of prerequisites: whether it would be mandatory for the city manager to live within the city limits, whether a candidate had to have previous experience as a city or town manager, whether any other public- or private-sector experience fulfilled the professional requirements, whether a criminal record of any kind disqualified a candidate from any public office in Chelsea.<sup>133</sup> Receivership notwithstanding, the charter-drafting process did not occur in either a utopian haze or a political vacuum, and CPT retained an essential pragmatism captured in alderman Nowicki's observation that there would be "no foolproof way to keep politicians out of politics."<sup>134</sup>

---

<sup>132</sup> Author's notes, Charter Preparation Team (CPT) Working Group meeting, March 8, 1994 (hereafter, all notes by author unless otherwise identified).

<sup>133</sup> Later, when that prohibition was limited to crimes directly related to the public trust, Ald. Stephen Powers commented that "if you're a convicted murderer, you can run, if you steal a stamp from City Hall, you can't," also pointing out that by those rules, a "rapist" could be city manager. Board of Aldermen's Governance Sub-Committee meeting, June 9, 1994. In 1997, former police vice-squad captain Leo "Buddy" McHatton, who had been convicted on tax-evasion charges stemming from state and federal corruption investigations, won a City Council seat but was denied after a court test of the charter's language. Alison Fitzgerald, "Elected By People, Ex-Cop Can't Serve, Court Says," February 4, 1999, Associated Press State & Local Wire.

<sup>134</sup> CPT meeting, March 15, 1994.

Although public support for a city manager usually was represented by receivership staff and other advocates as overwhelming, community sentiment varied. When asked about the city's prospective conversion to a city-manager model, respondents to Podziba's community survey had expressed completely contradictory impulses in the body politic: the community's desire to elect a chief executive collided with demands for professional qualifications, which are impossible to enforce on candidates moving through an electoral process. In CPT sessions and in other public meetings, Chelsea struggled with these diametrically opposed positions on what it would mean to the city and its citizens to remove direct electoral control over Chelsea's chief executive. However, the most consistent theme was a demand for more representation; the recurring question, how to produce it – and, at the same time, how to reconcile that demand with the simultaneous impulse to sequester the chief executive officer from raw political pressures and temptations.

Quoting the aphorism that the cure for the excesses of democracy is more democracy and not less, defenders of the mayoralty argued against replacing the mayor's office with a politically-insulated administrator more – rather than less – removed from the electorate. Even some of those who had supported receivership did not want to institutionalize its anti-democratic character but instead to restore a chief executive officer directly accountable to the electorate. Skeptical resident Sabina Ostrowska described a city manager as a form of over-compensation for Chelsea's previous troubles, pointing out that "a child burned on a hot stove is afraid of a cold one." A tiny, astute elderly woman with a heavy Polish accent and a Madisonian interest in the

workings of representative government, Ostrowska also challenged the rationale that a city manager would be buffered from the electorate and thus could take an unpopular (but presumably public-minded and/or fiscally sound) position, as long as the manager had City Council support. "That's my objection – all power sits in the council," she argued at one of the many meetings she faithfully attended, adding, "The city manager has to dance to the tune that the council plays."<sup>135</sup> She had been quicker than most to notice that Chelsea politics would not be abolished in this new form of government, merely re-assembled elsewhere.

For other Chelsea constituencies, the city manager's insulation from direct electoral challenge – susceptible as he or she might be to the will of the council majority – would be a new municipal asset rather than a democratic liability, and returning City Hall to its pre-receivership structure was unthinkable. The CPT member who had been monitoring the charter call-in line reported consistent community feedback about the toxicity of the word "mayor:" that even using the term in the charter for a merely honorific and ceremonial office would represent a throwback to "the old politics."<sup>136</sup> Residents who had been involved in the unsuccessful campaign to recall the most erratic of the mayors in the chaotic 1980s felt vindicated by receivership and vehemently opposed any gestures toward restoring the old order.<sup>137</sup>

Latino activists took an even more jaded view: their community had had so little previous access to City Hall that the imposition of receivership hardly

---

<sup>135</sup> Ward 2 meeting hosted by Ald. Letitia Ortiz at the Polish American Veterans Club, March 23, 1994.

<sup>136</sup> Domenic Pegnato, CPT Working Group meeting, March 8, 1994.

<sup>137</sup> Elizabeth McBride, interview, June 9, 1994.

had registered as a net loss of democracy. Thus the prospect of professionalizing the city's chief executive office offered the next opportunity to interrupt the exclusionary patterns of Chelsea politics. Asked early in the process about his preference between mayor or city manager for Chelsea, Latino alderman Juan Vega – no unalloyed fan of either Carlin or Spence – shrugged and said, "Keep the receiver."<sup>138</sup> Indeed, setting professional rather than political qualifications for the top City Hall job would approximate an extension of the receiver's tenure, although with few unilateral powers. For receivership's supporters and detractors, a city manager represented either continuation of receivership's best features or a perpetuation of its worst.

#### *Inside and Outside the Library Basement*

Deliberations on the city-manager/mayor question were complicated by two developments from outside the library basement. First, a mid-March story in one of Boston's daily newspapers quoted an unnamed receivership official treating the prospect of a city manager for Chelsea as a foregone conclusion.<sup>139</sup> Even though the CPT itself already had achieved at least provisional consensus on a city manager in one of its earliest meetings, the *Boston Globe* article – and its coverage in the local *Chelsea Record* – inflamed those members of the Board of Aldermen and other residents who suspected that the consultants had been pre-programmed to produce a city-manager charter no matter what the CPT or any other citizen said. Disclaimers from the receiver's office that the quoted material did not come from Spence himself and that its source would be disciplined internally did little to assuage

---

<sup>138</sup> Author's notes, n.d.

<sup>139</sup> Brian McGrory, "Chelsea Set to Try Self-Rule Once Again," *Boston Globe*, March 11, 1994, p. 21 (Metro/Region).

suspicious that "a group in another room" in the vicinity of the receiver's office was writing – or already had written – the "real" charter.

The next CPT meeting began with a lengthy discussion of the newspaper articles, the community's suspicions, and how to respond to what some CPT members saw as a frontal assault on the group's autonomy and integrity. Pegnato pointed out that if a city manager had been programmed from the outset, Spence would have hired a different consultant team, whose members included the author of a 1993 report advocating Chelsea's conversion to the city-manager form of government.<sup>140</sup> Nonetheless, the implication that the CPT was being manipulated into a predetermined outcome insulted some members: as one said, "I'm concerned that the Board of Aldermen is saying we're so weak, [mediator] Susan Podziba is making up our minds...I'm offended that someone would say we're just playing games here every Tuesday night."<sup>141</sup>

That controversy almost had subsided when the second watershed event occurred: a photocopy of the draft Carlin charter – the earlier document proposing a city manager but with few other similarities to the CPT's emerging draft charter – suddenly reappeared, left in the mailbox of an influential alderman particularly hostile to the charter process, Marilyn Portnoy. Formidable, quick to anger, and blunt, Portnoy regarded the resemblances between the two documents, however limited, as incontrovertible proof of "a done deal" – that whatever was in the charter was there at the behest of the receiver, and that anyone who thought the CPT

---

<sup>140</sup> Hendrickson and Beard, *op. cit.*

<sup>141</sup> John Hoadley, CPT meeting, March 15, 1994.

had a free hand was irremediably naïve.

In the wake of those two incidents, aldermanic representative Robert Shoemaker resigned from his CPT position. Portnoy read the text of his resignation letter into the record at the next meeting of her Sub-Committee on governance and then attacked the CPT directly:

I'm not offending anyone, because in all honesty, everybody from Chelsea who has served on the charter committee...they have been absolutely honest in their dealings, and they have tried very hard. They have integrity, they are decent people, but they are being led down the garden path...I've said it before, I'll say it again: it's a done deal.<sup>142</sup>

She also charged that the mail-in survey conducted at the beginning of the process had distorted true community sentiment, because only about 10 percent of the surveys had been returned. Moreover, she claimed, even though the consultants said they sent surveys to all households on the current voting list, she and other family members had not received theirs, while others she considered ineligible for such canvassing, including "someone who hasn't lived in the city in three years, hasn't voted in three years, lives in Puerto Rico today – they [sic] got a survey." After her speech, another at-large alderman looked into the Chelsea community-cable television camera and instructed his fellow citizens to "vote no" when the charter came up for approval by referendum.

Some CPT members again reacted defensively. Urging restraint, McGoldrick maintained that the aldermen's anger was aimed primarily at the receiver,

---

<sup>142</sup> Board of Aldermen's Governance Sub-Committee meeting, April 26, 1994.

and that "they couldn't hit him without hitting you."<sup>143</sup> Stung but adaptive, the CPT developed a strategy for responding to the substance and not the provocative tone of these challenges – drafting a letter to Portnoy that rejected the aldermen's characterization of their work, sending a delegation to the next aldermen's meeting to present the CPT's progress in person, and hosting another call-in cable TV show for direct citizen feedback. Then the charter-drafting group returned to the charter's operational issues.

It was not surprising that a hardy and belligerent core of aldermen became an identified pocket of resistance to charter reform in general and the manager/council form of government in particular. The 1991 receivership legislation had reduced the board's status to advisory, while the region's newspaper columnists continued to reduce it to buffoonery, second only to witticisms about Chelsea's supply of freshly adjudicated mayors.<sup>144</sup> Moreover, their demotion had been quite public. Carlin had rescinded their salaries, giving them piecework wages of \$150 per meeting while cutting their meeting dates by half and sending Spence to monitor their formally meaningless activities. The board's exodus from power took irrefutably physical form when the receiver's office began interior renovations at City Hall, making the aldermanic chamber on the second floor unavailable and forcing the board's removal to the nearby public library for its deliberations.<sup>145</sup>

---

<sup>143</sup> CPT Working Group meeting, April 26, 1994.

<sup>144</sup> The day before the charter vote, *Boston Herald* political columnist Howie Carr mourned the fact that the receivership had "tragically reduced the steady diet of rampant buffoonery and Keystone Cops corruption that has made Chelsea such a laff-riot [sic] over the last decade or so," and re-phrased the referendum question as: "do the taxpayers of Chelsea want a squeaky-clean city manager or do they want a return to the days of vodka-swilling, kickback-grabbing, vice-squad-impeding, reporter-baiting, payoff-demanding elected CEOs?" His analysis of the city's most urgent public-policy problem: "It's gotten boring." ("A Squeaky Clean Image Just Doesn't Fit Chelsea," June 20, 1994, p. 4).

<sup>145</sup> Later, at the point when the board was on the verge of recovering its refurbished chamber

While not universal among board members, aldermanic opposition to the proposed charter had a structural logic. Once the CPT had abolished the mayor's office as the grand prize in Chelsea politics, its contemplation of the aldermen's future role was – for some of the board's current members – tantamount to a threat of political extinction. From the point of view of an incumbent alderman, the advantages of being a city councilor in a system with proliferating districts, no mayoral endgame, and no routine way to overrule an executive decision were not intuitively obvious. Mediator Podziba tried to persuade the Board of Aldermen that the manager/council model would increase legislative power relative to the new CEO: according to an account in the local newspaper, she explained that as the city manager's employer, they would be engaged in "a different dynamic than having a Mayor. You hire the City Manager. You tell the manager what your priorities are and tell him to reflect those priorities in the budget (and throughout city government)."<sup>146</sup> Alderman Marilyn Portnoy responded skeptically to Podziba's pitch, "[Y]ou keep telling us we're going to be a powerful council and yet you're taking all our powers away."<sup>147</sup>

---

and at least a symbolic presence in City Hall, the aldermen faced another obstacle: a wheelchair-bound Chelsea resident raised the issue of whether the room satisfied the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In fact, ADA standards only could be met by installing an elevator in City Hall – an 18-month project, with a \$100,000 pricetag – as well as ramp access to the building. So the aldermen and the board's various committees continued to convene the library basement on Monday nights, in the low-ceilinged room off the library's historical collections where the CPT gathered on Tuesday nights, while the planning commission met in the children's section. When the new senior center opened, the aldermen met there.

<sup>146</sup> Eugene Sylvester, "Appointed vs. elected boards spark debate," *Chelsea Record*, June 1, 1994, p. 1 (capitalization as in the original text).

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*



### *Demand for a "Menu" of Local Options*

Suspicions that either the outcome was pre-determined or that the CPT was closing down options without adequate public input fed Portnoy's recurrent demand for a "menu" of municipal options among which voters could pick and choose. A menu format, for example, might present a selection among three options for the overall form of government: preserving the mayor/alderman form, adopting the council/manager form, or adapting a third hybrid alternative with a ceremonial mayor. The Vote No committee insisted that when Spence first introduced the charter-drafting process, he had promised the residents of Chelsea a menu format for the referendum, as had the then-chair of the Board of Aldermen's Sub-Committee on governance – former alderman Dom Pegnato. Pegnato had been succeeded by Marilyn Portnoy, who soon emerged as one of the charter's strongest opponents, and she used the chair's theatrical privileges to hound the receiver and the CPT on the menu issue, while Pegnato as CPT member had become one of the strongest advocates of the proposed charter. Spence disclaimed any prior commitment to a menu format, pointing out that a smorgasbord of options could subdivide the vote to the point where no option would win majority support.

There was one practical aspect to keeping the referendum limited to the proposed charter: a yes-or-no format produces a clear winner and a definitive loser.<sup>148</sup> At the last CPT meeting in May, state charter expert Contreas still was

---

<sup>148</sup> As Dom Pegnato explained, "If there was a menu with three options, you could have less than 30 percent of the population deciding" the outcome (March 15 CPT meeting). The math is a bit off: with three options, the winner would have to exceed 33.3 percent. But the point about a

assuring the committee, "This is what charter commissions do: propose a single charter in their own best judgment [and] put it up to the voters," rather than posing a series of options.<sup>149</sup> But in March, some CPT members saw the menu argument as a global attack on their work, and rose to defend the integrity of their deliberations. Nadine Mironchuk maintained testily that "this group is capable of making a decision" based on the various forms of community input, while John Hoadley argued, "I thought our job [was] to explore menus and then go back to the community...Just giving the community a menu without the education that goes with it [is a problem]."<sup>150</sup>

#### *From Board of Aldermen to City Council*

Once the CPT had closed the city manager/mayor question in favor of an appointed professional administrator, the group turned its attention to adjusting the rest of city government to this new format. Changes in the executive branch of Chelsea's government had implied transformation of the legislative branch, and the urban-governance "experts" – McGoldrick, consultant Mark Morse, and EOCD's Marilyn Contreas – understood the distinctions between the new city council and the existing board. But only gradually did the shape and significance of the new council/manager relationship become clear to the rest of the CPT members and other observers: that, in a role comparable to that of a corporate board of directors, the new council would set but not implement policy, hiring the city manager as CEO and then directing him or her in arm's-length transactions. At the same time, the new Chelsea City Council now would carry the full burden of direct

---

plurality rather than a majority vote was one of the key arguments against the menu.

<sup>149</sup> May 31, 1994.

<sup>150</sup> March 15, 1994.

municipal representation. To satisfy the continuing demands for broader representation in Chelsea's municipal government, there were three important issues to be settled: the number of council seats, the split between district and at-large seats, and the length of council terms.

The mechanics of the manager/council model are a departure from the familiar American constitutional arrangements: a consultant later told the new city councilors during their pre-inaugural training session, "Remember the separation of powers? Well, forget it."<sup>151</sup> The manager/council form is not analogous to the federal government's system of checks and balances, and it was not designed to be.<sup>152</sup>

The CPT and the city's various constituencies dwelled on the nature of the prospective relationship between a city manager and a new city council, trying to play out the constraints each would place on the other. Among the CPT's primary concerns was that by making the City Council the city manager's employer, the charter would produce a net increase of local legislative officials' leverage. In fact, while many of the aldermen were objecting to what they saw as a demotion, the CPT worried that the new council's ultimate power to control the stability of any city manager's tenure could be intoxicating in the city's competitive political environment. To deter the capricious use of close majority votes, the CPT therefore made provisions for a "supermajority" of councilors to act on critical hiring and firing decisions. (The corollary, that the city manager thus could protect his or her position by keeping a super-minority happy, later was pointed out by charter opponents.)

---

<sup>151</sup> Richard Kobayashi, interview, February 8, 1995.

<sup>152</sup> See Appendix A.

On the appointment of department heads, the CPT was presented with a strong recommendation: both Morse and McGoldrick urged that the city manager be allowed to appoint department heads without the council approval, the typical arrangement in New England.<sup>153</sup> With relatively recent memories of an protracted dispute over the tenure of the Chelsea chief of police, there was little disagreement that the city manager should be able to name heads of city agencies; these departmental managers then would be directly accountable to their boss. "The goal," Pegnato noted, the former alderman who became champion of new charter, "is that no one [will have] two bosses."<sup>154</sup>

Discussion was more extensive over the proper channels for formal and informal influence on the city's politically sensitive citizen panels on zoning, planning, licensing, and other local determinations. McGoldrick adamantly opposed an active role for the City Council in nominating, interviewing, recommending, or approving appointees: "You don't want to hold appointments hostage to the political process" in a "reverse veto."<sup>155</sup> The more contentious issue was whether City Hall department heads should be installed *ex officio* on the relevant boards and commissions as the voice of expertise and responsible enforcement of city standards, or whether that model would dilute citizen representation and stack the deck in favor of a

---

<sup>153</sup> The one exception is the city auditor, who the city council appoints as a check on the city manager; this structural tension was introduced as a requirement of federal revenue-sharing in the 1970s.

<sup>154</sup> CPT meeting, April 26, 1994. This subject prompted substantial debate on appropriate and inappropriate delivery of constituent services – the need to set new ground-rules to intercept aldermen accustomed to going straight to department heads or their staff for constituent problem-solving, routine or extraordinary.

<sup>155</sup> CPT Working Group meeting, March 22, 1994.

strong city manager.

Until the last hours of the Charter Preparation Team's work, discussion and dissension circled back to the recurring theme: how to provide a net increase in democratic representation, in the context of an appointed city manager, through the new Chelsea City Council. The most literal way to meet the demand would be the addition of city council seats, beyond the existing nine aldermanic slots: as CPT member Gwendolyn Robinson-Cofer put it plainly at the last public presentation of the draft charter, "You can't tell me nine is greater than nine. If [you] want more [representation], nine is not more than nine."<sup>156</sup> Member Joan Langsam put it in perhaps its purest form: "More means more." The question remained how many more would be enough, and in what distribution between district and citywide seats.

Arguments for opening the top of the funnel with more district-level seats and shorter terms – making it easier for first-time candidates to get into the electoral food-chain – were countered with warnings that the council would become unwieldy. Adding seats also raised the touchy issue of reconfiguring the existing ward system into new districts, unless the districts conformed to the two precincts in each of the city's five wards. The prospect of re-districting raised new anxieties about whether it would serve as a barrier or an avenue to greater participation by the electorate.<sup>157</sup> Some CPT members worried that redistricting would lead only to confusion over district lines and polling stations, and act as yet another deterrent to voters. Others minimized the

---

<sup>156</sup> Author's notes, final public charter presentation at the Chelsea Public Library, May 25, 1994.

<sup>157</sup> According to Tito Rosa, election turnout indicated that the city had "lost a lot of people" in the turmoil of the last redistricting. CPT meeting, March 15, 1994.

extent to which new districts and polls would discourage voters.

The debate came down to a fundamentally intuitive sense of the "right" number, or at least the "wrong" one. One proposal that pegged the council as high as 15 members had been endorsed at a community consultation meeting in early April, but CPT member Mironchuk was convinced that Chelsea could not field enough good candidates to support even 13 seats, and blocked consensus on the proposal for 10 district candidates and three at-large seats, a configuration which would have avoided the re-districting question altogether.<sup>158</sup> Aldermanic president Nowicki, originally a proponent of 13 councilors, cited feedback that such a large group would be unwieldy and withdrew his support for that number. McGoldrick made the unusual gesture of quoting the receiver, saying that Spence's (as well as his own) opinion was that the larger council would allow for better representation.

Ultimately, the proposed size of the new council was a last-minute calculation, half mathematical and half political: if 13 seats were too many, and nine implied no significant increase in representation, the odd number between them became the CPT's solution. Eleven councilors – a number that no one had championed as a gut-level "right" number, and never propounded at any of the public meetings. It satisfied the basic criteria for more representation: with eight district seats and three citywide positions, there would be more districts than there had been wards, and therefore there would be more councilors than there had been aldermen. The CPT also decided that all councilors, citywide and district, would have two-year terms,

---

<sup>158</sup> CPT meeting, March 15, 1994. Mironchuk repeated her sentiments that 13 was "too many candidates to ask Chelsea to produce" at the May 25 meeting, even though local residents at a community consultation meeting in early April actually had voted for the 15-member proposal.

a trade-off between continuity and access.

But the benchmark of 11 seats also was a number established without consensus, the first of two items voted by the "super-majority" rule at the final meeting of the charter-drafting group, and it left some members with a bad taste in their mouths. The proposal for a 13-member council had gone out to the May 25 public meeting, and even had won the straw poll held with the few residents who attended. Only three people at the meeting said that the final number and district/at-large split of city councilors would make difference between supporting the charter or not in the June referendum. Pegnato told the audience that he and other CPT members would bring feedback on the council and other issues back to the charter-drafting group's next and final meeting.

That marathon meeting began with a conversation about whether public opinion had shifted detectably on the size of the council. As the city-council composition question was gradually re-opened, some members expressed astonishment and even outrage that the question would be re-opened, since the members of the public at the May 25 meeting had supported the 13-member composition of the council, and CPT appeared to be ignoring that outcome. In the first round of voting, Podziba offered four options: two variations on a nine-member board (one reflecting the *status quo*, one creating more districts while reducing the number of citywide seats) as well as the 11-member and 13-member options. The nine-member options were knocked out easily. In the next round, the face-off between the 11-member and the 13-member council, the 11-member option won, but by a percentage of 78 1/2 percent – not enough for a super-majority.

Amid accusations (including Demko's frustrated outburst, "You people just defeated the charter") as well as late-night marathon-meeting hilarity, the polite pressures of consensus decision-making gave way to traditional majoritarian pressures on the three holdouts to switch their votes. Because of their concern about the disruptions of redistricting on voter turnout, particularly in the Latino community, both Tito Avellaneda and Tito Rosa stayed committed to the 13-member council, whose 10 districts would conform to existing ward and precinct lines. But Charles MacFarlane finally gave in, with conditions about how redistricting would be conducted. To close the deal, McGoldrick promised him, "Anything, anything...anything you want for public process" – marking the return of more traditional forms of Chelsea horsetrading.

The City Council interlude proved to be pivotal, setting two new precedents in the midst of the School Committee debate. It was the first use of the 80-percent rule to cement a particular charter feature on which there was no consensus. It also marked a meteorological shift in the atmosphere: before the City Council vote, several CPT members had descended on harbormaster Charles MacFarlane, pressuring him only half-kiddingly to change his vote and break the deadlock. The banter was the black humor of personal and political exhaustion, but the consensus principle faded into the background as CPT members joked with MacFarlane about what he needed to give up his objections – and he did, asking in exchange for a commitment to an open redistricting process. Whether he should have had to bargain for an open redistricting process was not addressed.



## NEW RULES FOR SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

The other instance when the pursuit of consensus gave way to the supermajority was the logjam over the configuration of the new school committee. By Podziba's own description, "[t]he most contentious issue [before the CPT] was the composition of the school committee."<sup>159</sup> To examine the decision-making process in more detail, the following section first provides background to the substance of the school-governance debate, then traces the CPT's problematic process and closes with a summary of the issues surrounding its outcome.

Partisanship aside, the dispute over participation and representation in governing the Chelsea public schools had a legitimate place in the CPT's ongoing contrapuntal discussion about how to create robust local democratic structures: solid enough for consistent policy implementation, porous enough for participation by new or previously excluded constituencies. If the CPT were to meet the citizenry's demand for more representation by creating more district seats for the future city council, there were grounds for at least a lively debate on a parallel strategy adding district seats to the existing school committee – which, unlike the Board of Aldermen, had had only citywide positions. Compounding that likelihood was Boston University's peculiar place on Chelsea's political landscape. With all these live issues, school governance had all the signs of an explosive issue, with numerous potential provocations for already agitated constituencies. Yet it was the issue that remained the most politically opaque between the charter supporters and the

---

<sup>159</sup> Podziba, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

Latino activist community, and the least fully examined by the Charter Preparation Team.

*Changing the Game:*

*District vs. Citywide Representation*

The argument for district representation on the School Committee went beyond symmetry with the new City Council. School committees are a traditional entry point into local electoral politics, and a district-level school committee seat is often the first rung on an elective career ladder. The cost of running for a school board is substantially lower than for city council (or alderman), and a district seat far more accessible than an at-large seat; for a political newcomer, the sheer scale of a citywide campaign may be prohibitive. A district seat thus may be not only attractive but indispensable to first-time candidates, parent candidates, and minority candidates – some of them drawn into the race because of their children's experience at school or their community's experience of the school system and not, at least in the original impulse, as part of a calculated trajectory of personal political advancement. District representation also brings access to constituent services closer to the neighborhood level. In an immigrant community with substantial flows of newcomers, who may or may not be legal residents or eligible for citizenship, district representation increases the chances of finding an advocate for students whose parents may not be voters, but who are required to be in school irrespective of their parents' citizenship status.

However, the CPT's school-governance debate had a muffled and disjointed quality. The composition of the new Chelsea School Committee did not get the focused attention that the other structural decisions – the overall form of

government, the legislative body, even the boards and commissions – commanded. Despite at least one explicit plea for a dedicated meeting, no session of the CPT was devoted only or primarily to the school committee, although members surfaced a series of complex proposals and significant issues were raised at public presentations on the emerging charter. When it appeared on the agenda, the issue often was crowded into the end of meetings when the group was weary and members were anxious to go home. Measured by time and focus, school-committee representation appeared to be a secondary or residual issue, particularly by comparison to the centrality of the new city council. Jesse Guevara, the receiver's personnel director who had been attending CPT meetings regularly and himself a supporter of a citywide school board, expressed his frustration when, at the last public presentation, the School Committee came up 11 minutes before the library would close, saying:

I'm upset. This issue is always left for the last 10 minutes. I'm not saying it's a conspiracy, it's just the way things happen. But I really resent it. Our children, our school system warrants more than five minutes. We should [make time to] revisit [these issues], because our kids are worth it.<sup>160</sup>

In fact, it was an issue that had been revisited often: by the time the final decision had to be made by invoking the 80-percent rule and pressuring one CPT member to change his vote, the new Chelsea School Committee had been cast in three different configurations over four different CPT meetings. But because of a lingering sense that the topic never had been fully explored, that it had been squeezed onto the CPT's agenda and then rushed off, it

---

<sup>160</sup> Final public charter presentation at the Chelsea Public Library, May 25, 1994. Noting "since we are on the air" via CCTV, Guevara also took the opportunity to summarize the proceedings in Spanish (there had been no other translation available) and to urge Latino viewers to vote.

remained an area of contention and bitterness.

There were distinctly different positions on how much power would lie in the future school committee's hands, whatever its configuration. The technical experts, McGoldrick and Morse, defined the scope of school-governance options within the charter-drafting process narrowly. McGoldrick argued that even after the BU contract expired, any future Chelsea School Committee would have a far more limited role in educational practice or administrative policy than its predecessor because of the state's 1988 education-reform legislation. Morse agreed that the 1988 bill had reduced the policy-making function of school committees statewide and made their primary responsibility the hiring (and firing) of superintendents, noting that it was the state norm that school-committee seats be only citywide posts, but not a requirement.

They also pointed out that the 1980 property-tax cap had tied the hands of school committees in setting annual school budgets, leaving less discretion even after BU's departure. "People are making a big deal about it," grouched CPT member Marlene Demko, "...[but] all powers are now gone from the School Committee. I don't want people to think if there are five Hispanic parents [on the school board], it's going to change things."<sup>161</sup> The School Committee's official CPT representative Chubby Tiro concurred that the charter-drafting group was "making a mountain out of a molehill" – albeit a molehill of which he was an incumbent and whose comfortable environment he showed no signs of being willing to relinquish.<sup>162</sup>

---

<sup>161</sup> CPT meeting, May 3, 1994.

<sup>162</sup> CPT meeting, May 3, 1994.

The fundamental split was over the nature and purpose of district representation. McGoldrick dismissed the need for district representation, particularly now that the Chelsea's scattered, neighborhood-based elementary schools were being consolidated on one site and middle schools on another, arguing, "Educational policy is citywide."<sup>163</sup> "So are city ordinances," shot back CPT member John Hoadley. The implications of Hoadley's logic were clear: even though city ordinances apply equally citywide and not by district, the charter-drafting group had expanded the number of district seats on Chelsea's new city council in conscientious response to the community's demand for more representation, so why couldn't the CPT create district seats for the new school board in pursuit of the same political objective? Raising the specter of renewed political crisis, McGoldrick countered that, without a citywide perspective and centralized authority not susceptible to electoral pressures, the politics of locating new educational facilities would be insurmountable: "If you had district representation in Chelsea today," he observed, "you'd never get new schools, because you couldn't site them."<sup>164</sup>

Nonetheless, the CPT still had the opportunity to establish district-level school committee seats, providing parents and students with more access to local legislative advocates as well as opening new entry-level positions in municipal politics. At the following meeting, Hoadley put an independently-

---

<sup>163</sup> CPT Working Group meeting, April 26, 1994.

<sup>164</sup> Even if McGoldrick's observation about the politics of siting were accurate, his point would be moot by June 30: by then the receiver not only had to deliver the charter to the state legislature but also make the school-siting decisions. As an artifact of receivership, the risk of political paralysis over those locational issues would be all but eliminated (to the extent that Spence made a unilateral rather than a consultative decision, although he had introduced the latter process as part of his effort to change the city's deliberative practices).

generated proposal on the table involving 10 district seats, additional at-large positions, and staggered terms.<sup>165</sup> The proposal drew the support of CPT member Bruce Mauch, who said that Chelsea had to overcome the discrepancy between its "integrated schools and a segregated board" by legislating more opportunity for the city's non-white constituencies to be represented at the district level. Other CPT members argued that district representation actually would be *more* exclusionary than a bloc of citywide seats, further fractionated by members' attentions to their geographical and ethnic constituencies.

A district system certainly would squeeze the six incumbents, forced to choose between running against each other either for a smaller pool of citywide spots or at the district level. Advancing a protectionist argument, CPT member Marlene Demko said she opposed district representation because if she were to seek office from her neighborhood, she and another longtime School Committee member have to run against each other – thus, in her eyes, knocking out one valuable schools advocate because of district lines. Mauch, however, noted that Demko's neighborhood – Prattville, a predominantly white middle-class area of single-family homes and duplexes separated from the rest of Chelsea by a state highway – dominated the then-current School Committee, even though the majority of its student-age population attended parochial schools.

Combined with the power of incumbency, this pattern tended to return the same pool of players to office: as former alderman Pegnato commented, "Once you're entrenched in a ward, if you haven't killed anybody lately,

---

<sup>165</sup> CPT Working Group meeting, April 26, 1994.

you're probably gonna get re-elected."<sup>166</sup> If the new school board were to remain all citywide, CPT member Carolyn Boumila-Agostino advocated for at least a significant increase in the number of seats, in order to provide a realistic opportunity for cycling fresh political blood through the system: "With nine [seats], you might have people dare take the chance [of running], if three seats are open. No one would dare run against the School Committee [incumbents] there now" – including Marta Rosa, who had been re-elected twice.<sup>167</sup> As the sole Latino ever elected to the school board, and with her historical mantle as the first Latino elected official, Rosa was a political big-foot who would be hard to challenge from within her own community.<sup>168</sup>

*"I'm Not Voting Any More:"  
Legitimacy of the Process*

The issue of stability in decision-making (and, implicitly, the legitimacy of the CPT's decision-making-process) came to a head during the CPT meeting just before a summary of the draft charter document was due to be mailed to every Chelsea household, in English or Spanish. At the previous meeting, the group had come to consensus on a configuration of five district seats and two citywide seats for the School Committee. Nonetheless, the district-representation issue suddenly appeared to be wide open again, without any of the procedural steps Podziba had emphasized at the beginning of the CPT's work. During the public-comment period at the beginning of the CPT's session, then-current School Committee chair Morris Seigal made a strong

---

<sup>166</sup> CPT Working Group meeting, April 26, 1994.

<sup>167</sup> CPT meeting, May 3, 1993.

<sup>168</sup> If this dynamic were to remain in place, with no incumbents having to contest each other for seats, the present composition of the board might perpetuate itself in a constant proportion of 5-1 (or, with the addition of one more city-wide member, either 6-1 or 5-2).

statement opposing district representation. He was joined by a Latino member of the receiver's staff, personnel chief Jesse Guevara, who agreed that "[s]chool issues are not neighborhood issues," but offered a different proposal: adding two more at-large seats, for a total of nine, to provide "the opportunity for more diversity."<sup>169</sup>

Without prior consultation with the group, Podziba re-opened the district/at-large decision when the CPT returned to school-board issues later in its agenda, unilaterally adding Guevara's proposal – that is, nine at-large members – as a new alternative. Overruling the objections of official School Committee CPT representative Anthony (Chubby) Tiro, she wrote three options on a chart, one of them with district seats and the other two at-large bodies of different sizes. After two rounds of voting, none of the options broke 80 percent, so Podziba proposed moving on to other agenda items and returning to the knotty School Committee decision later.

It was close to midnight when the group returned to the School Committee issue, and hostilities quickly escalated. With great frustration, CPT member Angel (Tito) Rosa declared the proposal for seven citywide members unacceptable because it did not respond to the Latino community's demands for greater representation. Podziba then put Guevara's proposal forward as the "midpoint proposal," on the basis that nine at-large "satisfies most of you for most issues." After another heated exchange with Podziba, Demko charged that the mediator was implying that "[i]f we can't compromise on nine, we're obstructionist." Podziba then initiated another vote, which did

---

<sup>169</sup> Guevara later changed his position on district representation. Interview, November 22, 1994. He also ran for the new Chelsea School Committee but lost in the December 6, 1994 election.



not achieve the decisive 80-percent margin. Podziba's voice became strident: "What can 80 percent of you come up with that you can live with?" "We don't want to be pushed into anything," protested Demko, and then announced, "I'm not voting anymore."

When Podziba framed another vote setting nine at-large against five district/four at-large, Demko objected again, saying, "You're not talking about seven at-large seats, which is still what majority of us in room voted for." Podziba responded, "What you risk is splitting the city. You're putting the charter at risk over two seats." At that point Rosa protested, "I can't live with that" (*i.e.*, with a school-board composition of seven at-large seats), reprising the mediator's signature phrase. CPT members begin to drift out of the room, because of both the late hour and the lingering deadlock, their departure interpreted a slight to those for whom the configuration of the School Committee was an urgent issue. At the end of the evening, a School Committee of seven citywide members – with one more seat than the existing school board, but with no district representation – remained in the draft charter unchanged.

An embittered Rosa seriously considered resigning from the CPT after the May 3 meeting. He was troubled by the unannounced appearance of School Committee chair Seigel, flanked by the highest ranking Latino on Spence's staff, a tableau suggesting that much more political activity had been going on behind the scenes. Moreover, he saw an example of procedural exceptionalism: while other dedicated citizens had addressed the CPT during the public-comment period that opened each meeting, their contributions always had been sequestered from influence on the current evening's agenda.

The standard CPT public-comment period had been designed conscientiously to solicit reflections from the public in retrospect – related to the previous meeting's work – rather than in prospect of the agenda ahead.<sup>170</sup> Even so, Guevara's new, so-called "midpoint" proposal became the centerpiece of the re-opened discussion, while CPT members whose suggestions had never been taken up for debate wondered how Guevara's proposition had gained such unusual status, trumping their efforts to expand the options available. He drew the conclusion that Podziba had been under pressure to deliver a citywide-only school committee.<sup>171</sup>

During the CPT's marathon final meeting, Podziba moved back and forth between the City Council and School Committee composition issues, trying to nudge each of these contentious decisions toward closure. When the City Council debate threatened to become stalemate, she tabled it temporarily and turned back to the School Committee. CPT member Rosa opened the School Committee discussion by declaring district representation "the bottom line," and when the conversation returned to the familiar arguments against district representation, Rosa suddenly withdrew in despair and disgust, saying, "It's not worth arguing. I'm too upset. Leave it [at seven at-large members], I'm tired of it." Podziba tried to retrieve him: "Tito, can you just try?" But Rosa was adamant: "No, I don't want to." Podziba again decided to return to the outstanding City Council decision and come back to the School Committee after the council's configuration had been settled.

After the City Council vote, the group returned to the School Committee

---

<sup>170</sup> This issue was discussed at the March 15 CPT meeting, when a dedicated member of the public objected to the built-in time-delay on input about the group's work.

<sup>171</sup> Interview, May 12, 1994.

conundrum, and Podziba again resorted to the 80-percent rule when the CPT returned to the School Committee district-representation deadlock. The question of whether the proposed school committee of seven at-large members should change based on feedback from the public was not easily resolved. Even Podziba acknowledged that it was "an issue the community is divided on" as she crafted votes on several possible alternative combinations, some of which Rosa and others abstained from voting on. None approached 80 percent, but when the last vote came down to four district/three at-large seats versus the existing proposal for seven at-large members, someone joked that MacFarlane together with Gwendolyn Robinson-Cofer had become a swing voting bloc, at which point Robinson-Cofer archly asked MacFarlane, "How long shall we keep them here?"

For the district-representation advocates, the implication that the swing School Committee votes were susceptible to a traditional political deal in what was supposed to be a non-majoritarian environment diminished the gravity of the critical choice at hand. Both the horsetrading and the horseplay left those advocates feeling that their issue again had been trivialized, and stunned that the crucial vote had become a joking matter. Those who had been pleading for district representation stood their philosophical and political ground alone, both angry and mystified that the rest of the CPT exhibited no sense of the magnitude of the battle just lost from their point of view. From the perspective of the Latino activist community as well as others in the city's progressive coalition who sought to widen the top of the funnel for political participation in Chelsea, the mediation process had modeled as well as reinforced the invisibility of Chelsea's political underclass.

### *Legitimacy of the Outcome*

So in the early morning hours of June 1, with three weeks to go before the referendum, the Latino leadership faced a difficult choice: whether to condemn the process and oppose the charter as written, at the risk of strengthening the role of the Vote No bloc in any future charter-drafting process, or instead to support an inadequate document offering no genuine reform on the issues of most immediate concern: school-board representation and its function as an entry-point into the local electoral system. Leaving the School Committee as a strictly citywide body with only one new seat would reinforce the city's political barriers to new Latino leadership, keeping the top of the funnel artificially narrow and continuing to buffer the BU contract from effective oversight. Adding a single slot to a group with only one identified but already-occupied "Latino seat" would not satisfy the demand for some demonstrated net gain. Yet the risk of an even less progressive outcome, were the charter to be re-written, was very real.

In their eyes, district School Committee representation had become a residual issue that the CPT neglected to explore fully – in part because the receiver's chief of staff had succeeded in minimizing what district representation could and could not achieve. The outcome was more than a simple defeat. Instead, it stood for a kind of willful incomprehension among the receiver's staff and sections of Chelsea's white constituencies, whose ability to overlook the particular importance of political representation in school governance resonated with the Latino community's sense of political marginalization. It also divided the Latino community, and the Commission board, over whether to endorse the final product in the June referendum.

## THE CHARTER REFERENDUM

The referendum campaign on the proposed charter already had effectively begun at the aldermen's April 26 governance Sub-Committee meeting, when Jordan first urged the electorate to vote the charter down. As the June 21 referendum day became more visible on the horizon, the atmosphere inside and outside the charter meetings in the library basement became increasingly confrontational. Once sides had crystallized in April, so did pressures to choose one, and the charter took its final form amid barrages of campaign rhetoric. Some CPT members began to defend the document they were still creating, some began to withdraw from it, and the group's policy debates began to include the strategic consideration of whether a given feature would aid or damage the chances of the charter surviving the referendum. After the last meeting of the charter-drafting committee on May 31, the local newspaper reported that the CPT's ultimate compromise on the number of city councilors had been fueled by "what many described as the growing momentum of the 'Vote "No" Movement' " – the first time that the *Record* had acknowledged organized opposition.<sup>172</sup> In the next several weeks, one enraged CPT member repudiated the document he had signed, the Hispanic Commission board rejected it outright, and a committee to promote the charter was hastily organized with a mounting sense of urgency that the CPT's product was at risk of defeat by the combined forces of "no."

---

<sup>172</sup> Eugene Sylvester, "Final Charter draft reads: 11 councilors – But city must be redistricted," *Chelsea Record*, June 3, 1994, p. 1.

*The Politics of Yes & No*

After the CPT's last meeting and final compromises, the referendum took on all the familiar features of a contentious local election. By early June, a "Vote Yes for Chelsea" Committee, highly identified with both the receiver and a cadre of pro-charter CPT members, was mirrored by a "Vote No for Democracy" Committee, which coalesced around a core of outspoken aldermen. Chelsea's Commission on Hispanic Affairs also weighed in with its formal opposition to the proposed charter, while making an explicit distinction between rejecting the charter and joining the Vote No forces.

Even though the Hispanic Commission's position shared a number of fundamental objections with the Vote No activists, the two groups' deep mutual antagonism precluded the possibility of forging an anti-charter alliance. Each camp held the equally strong conviction that they were being cheated of their rights – and that somehow, the other camp would be at a new advantage. The result was an opposition bloc with a firewall in the middle of it. This phenomenon of splintered resistance presented a complex set of choices for voters, many of whom cautiously eyed the strange constellation of allegiances they would be joining either as advocates or as opponents of the proposed charter. Latino and other progressive activists carefully calculated the potential political fallout from the document's approval or defeat: whether voting it down would empower their antagonists on the other side of the firewall.

Language on both sides grew more extravagant as the referendum

approached. The Vote No activists conducted a highly visible campaign against the charter, incorporating provocative phrases into their public statements and printed materials: that the charter was a "done deal," that the charter advocates had a "hidden agenda," that "promises made" had become "promises broken." Meanwhile, the Commission issued a strongly-worded public anti-charter position the week before the referendum, while individual members of the Latino leadership made their own decisions about whether or not to endorse the charter; the group otherwise expended no organizational energy either for or against the charter.

*The Receiver's Role in the Referendum:  
The Politics of a Guaranteed Outcome*

As the referendum approached, the character of Spence's role in the charter campaign moved from diplomatic ambiguity as the initiator of the charter-drafting process to an increasingly public partisanship vested heavily in the charter's ratification. The close association of his staff with the Charter Preparation Team – particularly the visible hand of McGoldrick as author – was interpreted widely as his virtual line-for-line approval of the charter.<sup>173</sup> Spence claimed to have exerted no editorial control over the language in the actual document and maintained that there were sections he would have written differently; privately, and then publicly, he professed a preference for both district and at-large representation on the new Chelsea School Committee.<sup>174</sup>

---

<sup>173</sup> McGoldrick was unapologetic about his role: "I work for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts," and he considered his responsibility to be the delivery of a viable charter document. Interview, June 14, 1994.

<sup>174</sup> See Spence's June 17, 1994 op-ed column in the *Chelsea Record*, "New Charter Will Benefit the Ordinary People" (p. 8). In an interview, he said that he "would have supported" the addition of district school committee seats, but maintained that it was a CPT decision (June 6,

But offering himself as an example of a responsible voter who, even with substantive differences over particular elements, would support the charter as a whole, Spence framed a "yes" vote for the charter as a civic duty – rather than championing participation in the referendum, irrespective of position. As the referendum neared, his public statements in support of the proposed charter excoriated the Vote No activists. His staff also was closely associated with the Vote Yes committee, and whether or not Spence was himself a card-carrying member, he became chief lobbyist for the pro-charter campaign, reaching out by telephone to give his close personal attention to those he considered key voters and sending intermediaries to those he could not contact directly (or effectively, at this point in his Chelsea career). Having promised that he would not submit the charter to Beacon Hill for legislative approval unless it were endorsed by the majority of voters who came out to exercise the franchise on June 21, Spence warned that to vote it down would "convey...the message that Chelsea can't come to consensus about its own future," and predicted only unpredictability in its wake, Chelsea's future "murkier" in a charter-less limbo.<sup>175</sup>

Electioneering on both sides of the charter campaign was to be expected in a city where politics long had been a contact sport, and where structural change clearly represented a threat to some players and an opportunity to others.

---

1994). In Podziba's account, Spence "did not insist on particular decisions within the charter...Even with the divisive issue of the school committee composition, the Receiver put the legitimacy of the process ahead of particular substantive decisions. In a private conversation with the mediator, the Receiver suggested the community would benefit from a school committee elected by district. However, he accepted the Charter Preparation Team's decision of a school committee elected at large" (*op. cit.*, p. 24-5).

<sup>175</sup> Christine Zybert. "What Happens Next? If Charter Defeated, Annexation Possible," *Chelsea Record*, June 17, 1994, p. 1.



However, there was something incongruous about Spence's posture. His interest in the draft charter's success permeated the electoral process and, as the referendum neared, gave it the familiar aura of a political campaign operating out of Chelsea City Hall. Moreover, the presence of the receiver's palace guard on the Yes committee: gave one prominent charter opponent plausible grounds to say, "I don't think people getting salaries should be out promoting the charter. Their job is to listen[,] not to push a 'yes' vote."<sup>176</sup> Even some of the new charter's supporters were uncomfortable with this staging, as though a traditional mayoral organization were getting out the vote for a chieftain's favored initiative – giving the whole exercise a ghostly, if unintended, similarity to pre-receivership days. For the receiver to be acting more like the mayor at the head of a local political organization than a disinterested state official completing a mandated task gave added impetus and credibility to the Vote No activists, who could reject the document more convincingly as "Harry's charter."<sup>177</sup>

Spence indeed became a prominent plank in the Vote-No platform. His perceived control of the CPT and its range of motion was one of the anti-charter group's central issues. Spence's reputedly broken commitment – and his forthright refusal – to put a menu of local options on the ballot became one of the concrete examples of the receiver's grip on the process and his distortion of the outcome that the Vote No committee could offer the electorate. "Promise Made!!! Promise Broken!!!" proclaimed one of the group's more effective advertisements in the *Chelsea Record*, and the alleged

---

<sup>176</sup> Ald. Powers quoted in Christine Zybert, "Residents Mobilize the Troops for City Charter Vote Tuesday: Both Sides Trade Accusations, Polls Open 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.," *Chelsea Record*, June 17, 1994, p. 1.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

betrayal of the alleged menu commitment remained the charter foes' quintessential broken promise.<sup>178</sup> At-large alderman Donald Jordan, who had become one of the most visible and voluble anti-charter activists, declared that because Spence and Pegnato had violated the menu pledge, he would no longer participate in the board's deliberations on the proposed charter except to vote against it, given the opportunity:

I cannot, in good conscience, sit in a meeting on a decision of a charter not made by the voters of Chelsea. I feel I would be a hypocrite. I will vote on it if it comes before the regular board. That vote, no matter what changes are made, will be "no." When it comes up for referendum, I will encourage all to participate and to "VOTE NO."<sup>179</sup>

The menu image and the confined set of choices it had come to represent turned the discourse to the fundamental issue of democratic choice, and the charter opponents seized on that language to crystallize their opposition.

But beyond questioning his role in the document itself, charter opponents accused the receiver of creating or exploiting an artificial crisis: scaring voters with the possibility that if the proposed charter lost, annexation might follow, or the state might take the charter out of Chelsea's hands altogether and write a new document unilaterally. From the point of view of the receiver, June 30 was a genuine and urgent deadline that could not slip, because it was identified in the Chapter 200 legislation as the delivery date for whatever charter the receiver had developed; Spence had committed himself to

---

<sup>178</sup> *Chelsea Record*, "Reason #3" to vote against the charter, June 15, 1994, p. 5; *Chelsea Record*, "We Were Promised a Choice and a Menu Format on the Charter – Promise Broken," June 15, 1994, p. 1.

<sup>179</sup> From Jordan's letter to the editor, "I Wanted a Menu Charter Format," *Chelsea Record*, June 1, 1994, p. 4.

forwarding the results of the CPT's work or no charter at all. Submitting the charter by June 30 also was the receivership legislation's anchor for a date certain by which Chelsea would be restored to self-government. For opponents, however, June 30 represented an arbitrary deadline, whose urgency was more imaginary than real, used to create additional leverage for the charter by promoting an unnecessary sense of panic: support the charter or the city's days are numbered.<sup>180</sup>

The Vote No committee combined a highly-personalized suspicion that the charter was meant to disempower a particular set of political actors in Chelsea with a somewhat inchoate sense that the Latino community was gaining some concealed advantage in the new charter. That reputed advantage, some net advance in a zero-sum competition, could not be articulated much beyond the complaint that there was no absolute prohibition against non-citizen voting, but it was dramatized by the xenophobic rhetoric in a Vote No written statement:

[I]f you think the word "citizen" should be in the proposed charter, come on down and join the committee. That's right[,] folks, the word "citizen[,]" as in US citizen, is not even in the proposed charter. They substituted the word "Voter" instead. If you don't like that, come on down and voice your opinions.<sup>181</sup>

Converting City Hall to a city-manager form of government was cast as an

---

<sup>180</sup> Another Vote No argument: if charter defeated, extend the legislative deadline and hold a binding referendum for a menu-style primary in the fall, then draft new charter following those choices (DJ). If that deadline that had been created legislatively, it also could be moved legislatively, through the somewhat magical application of Chelsea's still disproportionate political clout on Beacon Hill; if used previously to impose receivership, it could be used equally selectively to extend the deadline for the new charter.

<sup>181</sup> "Vote No' Committee to Hold Meeting: Members List Reasons vs. Charter" (no byline), *Chelsea Record*, June 10, 1994, p. 2, punctuation as in the original text.

anti-democratic extension of receivership: "It's true we've made mistakes in the past, but if this proposed charter is voted the way it is now, we'll be living under dictatorship for life. Let's make them do it right the next time, with Democracy."<sup>182</sup>

Even though the anti-charter activists had taken "Vote No" as their slogan and identifying banner, alderman Donald Jordan objected to his wing of opponents being characterized as "naysayers, obstacles – [that] we're 'the old Chelsea.' What we want is honesty here, all I want is the truth told."<sup>183</sup> Jordan insisted:

We're not against the charter but how it was done. They controlled meetings by "revisiting" issues. The Chelsea people involved were manipulated. [To support the charter would be] not a vote for the charter but a vote for receivership.<sup>184</sup>

Proclaiming, "We Were Promised a Choice and a Menu Format on the Charter – Promise Broken," one of the final Vote No ads matched the language with a graphic image of a pencil snapped in two. This jagged emblem of "broken" was a vivid depiction of the group's position that the referendum – whose paper ballots would be filled out with a No. 2 pencil on referendum day – was a hypocritical exercise with no real choice and a foregone conclusion.<sup>185</sup> The theme of unkept commitments was reinforced in an angry letter of resignation from former CPT member Bruce Mauch, published in the same edition, withdrawing his previous support for the

---

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> Interview, December 6, 1994.

<sup>184</sup> Interview, December 6, 1994.

<sup>185</sup> *Chelsea Record*, June 15, 1994, p . 5.

charter because of revisions made in his absence.<sup>186</sup> Procedural issues aside, he also rejected the new language.

*The Other No:*

*La Comisión Dice "¡No!"*

While sharing the sense that the receiver had both rushed and manipulated the charter process, the Hispanic Commission's critique of the charter stood in sharp contrast to the fears of the Vote No constituency. The claims of a pro-Latino slant in the proposed charter were difficult for the Latino community to detect, particularly after the School Committee district representation battle had been lost. In fact, none of the Commission's suggestions or preferences had been incorporated into the final document. Having first suggested a nine-member board with five district and four at-large seats, the Commission considered the proposed new configuration incapable of representing Chelsea's school population. Also, to avoid re-districting, the Commission had supported the 13-member City Council, but only if 10 district seats districts conformed to the city's existing precincts, which now were subject to geo-political disruption. In addition, the Commission's preferred model for municipal executive – an elected mayor mandated to hire a professional administrator, with a job description of a chief operating officer – had been dismissed.

---

<sup>186</sup> *Chelsea Record*, " 'Not the Charter That I Endorsed,' " June 15, 1994, p. 4. Before receivership, Mauch had been a member of the city's licensing board, and he maintained that no one had told him that new language had been inserted into the draft charter about the new licensing body for Chelsea, even after he asked specifically whether any change had occurred at a penultimate meeting he could not attend. His letter appeared along with Nowicki's support letter and Nadine's answer to Mauch (suggesting that she had been given an opportunity to respond even before the letter was published).

After a long, heated, and bilingual debate, the Commission board voted against endorsing the charter at its June meeting the week before the referendum. According to the statement released after the vote, the Commission rejected the charter because it had "[n]o method or process for political inclusion of all residents in city affairs," adding, "Contrary to the belief of some people in this city, who have made derogatory racist remarks to manipulate public opinion and insinuate that in some miraculous way this charter gives Hispanics more power, the Commission membership...could not find in the charter any evidence for real gains for its constituents."

It also firmly distinguished the Commission's position from the Vote No group by noting that the Commission's membership had taken a firm and explicit stand against "the racist motivation of some of the opponents of the charter and disassociat[ed]...[the Commission] from their negative efforts to divide the community, especially over issues related to immigrants."<sup>187</sup> Whatever middle ground might have located between the Commission's membership and the Vote No constituency was tainted, in this view, by poisonous anti-immigrant rhetoric and underlying racism.

While a majority of the board formally rejected the draft charter, a *realpolitik* analysis had emerged within the Commission. Dissenters from the vote regarded the charter as a flawed document and had little appetite for joining the receiver-identified Vote Yes advocates, but they saw a greater danger in handing the Vote No constituency a victory. They also were unwilling to risk a charter rewrite either by the state or by another Chelsea charter-drafting

---

<sup>187</sup> "¿Representa La Propuesta Carta Orgánica en Paso Adelante para los Hispanos en Chelsea?"/"Does the Proposed Charter Represent a Step Forward For Chelsea Hispanics?" (no byline), *El Faro*, Junio/June 1994, pp. 1, 9.

group in which the Vote No crowd now could claim electoral support. During the board's internal debate, alderman Juan Vega (who, like Tito Rosa, was on the Commission staff as a community organizer) told the group that despite his fears about the potential for voter confusion due to redistricting, he had decided to support the charter because it was

important that the city show it can take responsibility for itself and to progress...The charter has problems but I'm voting yes...I'd rather begin the transition out of receivership than extend the process.<sup>188</sup>

Vega also noted, "We can revisit it in five years," when the charter language specifically called for a charter review, and then every subsequent ten years. Other Latino charter supporters were far less equivocal. Jesse Guevara, the receiver's personnel chief and a vocal charter advocate, told the *Record*, "I hope people come out and vote their consciences," adding that the charter opponents have been using unfair and racist tactics."<sup>189</sup>

Faced with these dilemmas, individual Commission board, staff, and members made their own independent decisions about whether to promote or to vote for the charter. Even Tito Rosa, who had been so frustrated at the last CPT meeting that he had retreated from the discussion altogether and still maintained deep reservations about the process, remained largely silent at the Commission meeting, and ultimately he stood with Vega and Guevara in a pro-charter "consensus" photo in front of Chelsea City Hall, a publicity shot

---

<sup>188</sup> From author's notes, Chelsea's Commission on Hispanic Affairs board meeting, June 15, 1994. Vega and Ald. Letitia Ortiz walked out of a June 6 Board of Aldermen's meeting when a discussion of the proposed charter became a shouting match so raucous that some aldermen asked for the CCTV camera to be turned off. Christine Zybert, "Aldermen Clash Over New Charter," *Chelsea Record*, June 8, 1994, p. 1.

<sup>189</sup> Christine Zybert and Don Harney, "Voters Wanted Change from Corruption of Past Officials," *Chelsea Record*, June 22, 1994, p. 1.

for the *Chelsea Record* along with Vega. He even joined the rest of the CPT in signing a cover letter endorsing the published charter document, which soon began to resemble a Xeroxed version of the *Declaration of Independence*, the inelegant twentieth-century John Hancocks already fading from being photocopied too many times. Whatever his hesitations, he had decided that the destabilized political environment of a defeated charter risked both prolonging the receiver's stay in Chelsea and producing a new charter that deferred to the forces of reaction.

Others felt pushed sufficiently to the margin that they had to oppose the charter – including Commission board president Marta Rosa, Tito's own spouse, who led the charge against it and summarized her misgivings in a few words: "There is nothing to represent the Latino community in the charter. It does not help the minority community."<sup>190</sup>

#### *Vote Yes*

With the two independent (if mutually repugnant) anti-charter groups apparently gathering force, the receiver and charter supporters entered referendum season on the defensive, particularly worried that if "no" voters voted in disproportionately large numbers and undecided voters – confused by the process, bored by the details, or turned off by the controversy – stayed home in droves, the charter might not survive the referendum. Pro-charter activists scrambled to create a bandwagon in the June 8 press release that appeared in the *Chelsea Record* along with the opening volley of "Vote Yes for Chelsea" advertisements. The first public indication of organized charter

---

<sup>190</sup> Marta Rosa, Chelsea's Commission on Hispanic Affairs board meeting, June 15, 1994, author's notes.



support, it strained to suggest that the supporters of the charter had as much positive momentum (and popular enthusiasm) as its opponents had negative momentum:

...[M]any people in Chelsea have already joined together in the spirit of an "old-time" rousing campaign to encourage people to get out and vote that day for Chelsea's future..."This is the biggest step people can take to bring Chelsea out of receivership successfully and continue on into the new century," said chairman of the committee, Dom Pagnato. "The city[-]manager form of government is one that the people of Chelsea have called for overwhelmingly, and is the key to the new professional, competent, and honest administration of our City's business."<sup>191</sup>

It was an incongruous statement. The nostalgic appeal to some prior "old-time" golden era of citizen involvement, implying that there was a time in Chelsea history when campaigns were noisy but wholesome, contradicted the language in another Vote Yes advertisement in the same edition that proclaimed, "It's TIME we said "NO" to old-time Chelsea politics!"<sup>192</sup> By June 15, a nationally-televised CBS "60 Minutes" segment on Chelsea had provided fresh embarrassment to the city. In an ad proclaiming "Return to Self Government & Democracy for Chelsea," the Vote Yes camp added the tag line: "Show the state and the '60 Minutes' producers that Chelsea is ready to govern itself once again!"<sup>193</sup>

While invoking "the people," the press release itself made clear that the pro-charter activists who formed the Vote Yes committee were strongly identified with the receiver and the Charter Preparation Team, including seven CPT

---

<sup>191</sup> "Vote Yes on Charter Committee to Meet on Thurs.; Public Invited" (no byline), *Chelsea Record*, June 8, 1994, p. 4.

<sup>192</sup> *Chelsea Record*, June 8, 1994, p. 4.

<sup>193</sup> *Chelsea Record*, June 15, 1994, pp. 1, 11.

members, two high-ranking City Hall employees, a Spence-appointed chair of the Chelsea Excise Board, and a former School Committee member who had volunteered to facilitate charter presentations to community organizations early in the charter-development process.<sup>194</sup> An effusive quote from Nadine Mironchuk, CPT member and Spence's public-affairs staffer recounted,

I have talked to hundreds of people in this process...[and] it is clear that people are excited about getting on the next step of our journey back to self-determination in government...I, like many others, watched Chelsea people "disengage" from the process of government, and I hope now to see this new energy bring everyone back into the process...I talked to a local school teacher just this weekend who prayed out loud that the new charter would contain safeguards against misuse of public authority. I stressed to her that we can start fulfilling our roles as citizens by voting in this charter – one that features many ethical constraints and guidelines.<sup>195</sup>

The receiver himself was not mentioned in the press release, but Spence and his partisanship became increasingly visible as the referendum approached. If the anti-charter forces were going to wrap the document around his neck, Spence was going to wear it with pride and promote its value in social capital. The week before the election, he wrote a lengthy opinion piece published in the *Record* urging voters to support the charter, and on referendum day, standing in front of the polling station at the Sagamore Street firehouse in the Prattville section of the city, he railed against the charter's opponents:

They have given the people of the city a clear choice between the old politics of negativity, innuendo and misrepresentation [on the one hand,] and [on the other hand,] what the people really want, which is the emerging politics of confidence in the city, confidence in the citizenry and confidence in the future of

---

<sup>194</sup> Asa Hubner, John Hoadley, Dom Pegnato (and his wife), Barbara Weston (and her husband), Helen Ularich, Nadine Mironchuk, Howard Dixon, Edward Ells, Alexander Nappan, and Elizabeth McBride. Mironchuk and Howard Dixon were members of both the CPT and the receiver's staff.

<sup>195</sup> *Op. cit.*

Chelsea.<sup>196</sup>

Sounding much like an electoral candidate himself, Spence claimed to know "what the people really want" – and as in most campaigns, his opponents posed competing claims of insight into that mystery.

*The Role of the Newspapers:  
Advertising & Editorializing*

In a small community, local newspapers are a primary vehicle for need-to-know information and advertising – for some residents, a vital source of news and opinion considered reliable, or predictably unreliable. The two newspapers published in Chelsea at the time of the referendum served those purposes.<sup>197</sup> The *Chelsea Record* was the thrice-weekly broadsheet of uneven quality whose news pages functioned as a patchy chronicle of the city's civic life and whose editorial page provided a venue for fulminations on local political disputes. *El Faro* ("The Lighthouse"), the bi-lingual monthly newspaper published by Chelsea's Commission on Hispanic Affairs, was both populist and analytic in tone, with a clear advocacy function.

At the time of the receivership, the *Record* still was highly identified with its late publisher, Chelsea politician Andrew Quigley, and it had long been considered a vehicle for what one Boston daily euphemistically called "a forum for his colorful views."<sup>198</sup> A member of a dynastic Chelsea family, his

---

<sup>196</sup> Christine Zybert and Don Harney, "Voters Wanted Change from Corruption of Past Officials," *Chelsea Record*, June 22, 1994, p. 1.

<sup>197</sup> The legendary *Chelsea Advocate*, a scurrilous but widely-read weekly published by James Mitchell, had launched his political career.

<sup>198</sup> Kevin Dotson and Don Aucoin, "Andrew Quigley, 64; a Force in Chelsea Politics, Journalism," *Boston Globe*, May 27, 1990, p. 47.

father Lawrence having been mayor of Chelsea in the 1920s and 30s, Andrew inherited his father's mantle early in life: Chelsea's state representative at the age of 22 and state senator at 24, he went on to be mayor at 25 and then a near-permanent member of the school committee. Acquiring the *Record* in 1976, Quigley remained publisher while on the school board, despite conflict-of-interest charges from other School Committee members and political opponents. He also was widely credited (or blamed) for Boston University's entry into the Chelsea public schools, having approached BU president John Silber in 1986 with the proposal that the university take over the failing system.

Even before the controversial BU contract, however, former publisher Quigley and his newspaper had been regarded as actively hostile to the Latino community: a 1990 report by the College of Public and Community Service University of Massachusetts at Boston analyzing local press coverage cited both specific instances of the *Record's* apparent bias and its neglect of the city's newer constituencies – or any political points of view opposed to Quigley's own.<sup>199</sup> After Quigley's death in 1990, the *Record* was run by his son Stephen, and under his leadership, the *Record* was generally supportive of receivership, with periodic reminders that it should end.<sup>200</sup>

In the final weeks before the referendum, the *Record* made a more than perfunctory effort to acknowledge the strong feelings on both sides of the

---

<sup>199</sup> *Hispanics in Chelsea*, Center for Community Planning and Collaborative for Community Service and Development, University of Massachusetts at Boston, College of Public and Community Service, September 1990. See also Frank S. Neidhardt, "News That Matter, News That Count: Why Chelsea's Hispanic Community Needs a Voice of Its Own," *El Faro*, *Noviembre*/ November 1990.

<sup>200</sup> The newspaper had been sold to a larger chain in 1988. Stephen Quigley, interview, March 29, 1995.

charter issue, including the official opposition of the Hispanic Commission, through its news coverage as well as printing signed opinion pieces and letters to the editor. In the last edition of the *Chelsea Record* before the charter referendum, the newspaper editorialized in favor of the charter, devoting the rest of its editorial page to what the headline called "Point, counterpoint on the Charter." A pro-charter statement from Spence appeared on the bottom half of the space, and at the top an anti-charter statement under alderman and former CPT member Shoemaker's byline got in the last word for Vote No.<sup>201</sup>

A platform for the Commission's ongoing battle against the Boston University contract and other injustices it regarded as systemic in nature. *El Faro* had a more circumspect response to the imposition of receivership, treating it generally as an anti-democratic cure for an anti-democratic disease. As a monthly, *El Faro* emphasized analysis over breaking news, monitoring the evolving charter language and commenting on its possible implications. It also dug into neglected topics, or topics that did not get a full discussion at the CPT – publishing, for example, an article on historical instances of non-citizen voting in the US.<sup>202</sup>

Despite the official opposition of the Commission board, the June edition that appeared just before the referendum was relatively restrained on the subject of the charter, encouraging citizens to study the document and vote on the basis of what they read rather than exhorting its readership to vote it down unilaterally. It featured a summary as well as a critical analysis of the final

---

<sup>201</sup> Shoemaker's "Vote 'No' and We Will Do It Right This Time" was paired with Spence's "New Charter Will Benefit the Ordinary People," June 17, 1994, p. 8.

<sup>202</sup> Ramón Olivencia, "Los No-Ciudadanos y el Derecho al Voto en Chelsea" / "Allowing Non-Citizens to Vote," *Junio* / June 1994, pp. 3, 10.

version of the charter. Comparing the city's political space to a rectangular dance floor, the June editorial was measured rather than apocalyptic in tone, emphasizing the limits of the charter's practical impact:

If we were suddenly to change the shape of the dance floor from a rectangle to a hexagon, the old crowd would simple re-adjust its bearings, adapt to the new space, and continue with the same old dance. The new charter may somewhat alter the conditions of the political arena, but if the players are the same, we are likely to see more of the same ridiculous spectacles to which we have grown accustomed.<sup>203</sup>

Closing with sentiments remarkably close to the exhortations of Vote No, the editorial also urged

all residents to study the document carefully before casting their vote and to discuss whether this is the document that we should live by. If there are too many gaps and too many unanswered questions, then it should go back for further revisions.<sup>204</sup>

However, in a non-partisan spirit, the paper also published a quarter-page advertisement encouraging Latinos to vote, without specifying the vote *El Faro* or its parent organization might prefer residents to cast.

#### *The Outcome and the Aftermath*

On June 21, 1994, Chelsea voters approved the charter by a comfortable 60-percent, 550-vote margin, with just over 1600 votes in favor of the charter out of nearly 2700 cast. The results were uncontested, and there were no

---

<sup>203</sup> "¿Nueva Acta Orgánica o Nuevos Políticos?"/"New Charter or New Politicians?" *Junio* / June 1994, pp. 3, 2.

<sup>204</sup> In the English version, the editorial ended, "Whatever the results of the referendum, we must not forget that this procedure is non-binding and that the State Legislature has the final word. As far as we are concerned, let it be according to God's wishes (*Que sea lo que dios quiera*)."

complaints of vote-tampering or other irregularities. The 30-percent turnout was high for a referendum held independent of other elections. The results were announced within hours after the polls closed, as partisans and reporters crammed into the Election Department in City Hall to hear the official precinct-by-precinct count. Charter supporters celebrated in the lobby outside Spence's office as the receiver presided over innumerable interviews declaring the charter-drafting process – and its product – a success.

Charter Preparation Team members who had gravitated to City Hall for the official tally drew straws, amid much hilarity, for the chance to keep the mediators' hand-drawn chart that had accompanied the meetings in the basement of the Chelsea Public Library and other venues throughout the city. The chart – which, the committee had come to associate with the tiresome process recitation that opened each of their sessions like a schoolroom Pledge of Allegiance and which for some members had come to represent the diversionary surface-level exercise that masked the "real" charter-writing process – became a souvenir.

In the aftermath of the vote, local commentary on both sides was relatively subdued and philosophical. Helen Ularich, the CPT member who had fought for the reference to the deity in the charter's preamble, gave credit where she thought it was due: "God's hand is in all of this."<sup>205</sup> Political activists immediately turned their attention to the next field of engagement: the city elections to come and the subsequent city-manager hiring process. Ward 1 Alderman Juan Vega, the Hispanic Commission organizer who defied the

---

<sup>205</sup> Christine Zybert and Don Harney, "1,619 vote yes, 1,068 vote no; Legislature to get new charter," *Chelsea Record*, June 22, p. 1. All quotes in this paragraph are from this story.

Commission's board by supporting the charter (albeit with no great enthusiasm), reminded both sides that even with the structural questions settled for the visible future, the daily work of democratic vigilance would necessarily continue: "I'm glad the people voted the way they did," he told the *Record*, adding, "The charter passing today doesn't make it all okay" – an astute (if awkward) observation that the referendum marked not the end of Chelsea political history but rather the beginning of its next phase, that the game would continue, under a new set of rules. A harsher judgment came from Mironchuk: "I hope the people of Chelsea remember those officials who treated voters with respect and those who treated them with disregard and contempt, [who] frightened and outright lied to them."

In defeat, the charter opponents were uncharacteristically circumspect and muted. One charter opponent, Teresa Czerepica, told the *Record* that she "would have liked to sit down with the Yes committee to work out some of our differences."<sup>206</sup> This plaintive (and perhaps disingenuous) plea had at its core a democratically important insight: that despite Spence's didactic expectations and glowing praise for the Charter Preparation Team, the elaborate facilitation process had played no real role in overcoming that gap, and had done little to teach people who genuinely disagreed with each other how to hold a public conversation or resolve a public conflict.

Meanwhile, the implementation of the new rules of the game lay ahead. A letter to the editor in the *Chelsea Record* a week after the vote thanked voters for the "clear message that the people of this city want honest, professional government" and the CPT for "your good work that made our job of 'selling'

---

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*



the charter so much easier."<sup>207</sup> Like Vega, the anonymous author also turned the reader's attention to the resumption of the game:

We must remember that our first City Manager will only be as good as the City Councilors who hire him/her. If we choose to elect an educated, professional City Council and School Committee, then we will be assured of getting an educated and professional City Manager to run our fine city. The future of Chelsea rests literally in the hands of every individual who goes out and votes in the next municipal elections.

The charter referendum represented an important threshold, but more challenges lay ahead in the next transitional steps from receivership to the return of the "real" political process: the first rounds in the new field of engagement for the same antagonists under new rules, and with it the first tests of charter's utility and durability.

---

<sup>207</sup> "The People Wanted Honest Government" (unsigned), *Chelsea Record*, June 29, 1994, p. 10.

## TESTING THE NEW CHARTER

Forwarded to the legislature on schedule by Spence, the new charter represented the beginning of the end of receivership for Chelsea. Elections were set to occur 120 days after the state's official acceptance of the charter, and while the new city council still would operate on an advisory basis until the receiver withdrew, Spence had committed himself to devolving the city-manager search onto the councilors. The prospect of having a role in that key decision drew candidates from across the political spectrum, and the city's political attention turned to the next theater of operations: redistricting the city and electing the first Chelsea City Council as well as the reconstituted Chelsea School Committee. Both offices inspired familiar faces to join or rejoin the electoral process, and the now-foreseeable departure of the receiver fired the imaginations of an array of new political actors as well.

Under the terms of the charter, the city's five wards were to be redrawn into eight districts, so even incumbents faced a degree of uncertainty that gave competitive energy to the City Council race and inspired some formerly ward-level aldermen to seek citywide seats on the council.<sup>208</sup> Although the School Committee had remained a citywide body, the addition of one new seat and the departure of two other incumbents also added a degree of suspense. Two longtime Chelsea School Committee members attempted to make the traditional crossover to the city's new legislative body, and a wide pool of

---

<sup>208</sup> The redistricting task fell to McGoldrick, Spence's municipal handyman who re-drew the lines after only one meeting with little turnout, despite protests that the receiver's office had provided little notice and none in Spanish (and despite his commitment to MacFarlane at the final CPT meeting).

candidates from assorted constituencies sought to replace them, thereby also to enter that elective training ground. Despite concerns about how many "good" candidates the city could generate with more districts, all eight districts had contestants for city council, while more than half-a-dozen candidates pursued the three at-large positions; the seven citywide school-board seats had nine contenders. And despite concerns about potential confusion about new polling stations or district lines, voter turnout was relatively high: only 35 percent of Chelsea's registered voters had been expected to cast their ballots, but the participation rate approached 50 percent.

However, the results of the School Committee race fulfilled the fears of CPT member Tito Rosa and others who had supported district representation for that body: no Latino candidates won any of the seven at-large positions. Since School Committee member Marta Rosa had given up her seat to run for City Council, Latino children and parents were left without an electoral voice on the new Chelsea school board halfway through the life of the Boston University contract.

In addition, on election night, it appeared that the new City Council would have only one Latino member. Of the two incumbent Latino ward aldermen, Juan Vega preserved the seat in his reconfigured district, but Letitia Ortiz lost hers nearly three-to-one; her new district included the Admirals Hill condominium development, whose residents elected one of their own to the seat. Thus, while the Latino community had three elected representatives at the city level under the old system, it now had only one – and although the race for both local offices had attracted a total of seven Latino candidates, only one had survived the first electoral process under the new system.

Because of an unpredictable twist in the outcome of the race, however, the new Chelsea City Council ultimately did have additional Latino representation. This first test of the new Chelsea city charter sparked a fierce debate over the interpretation of the relevant provision in the charter language. The subsequent selection process for the new city manager turned on similar interpretive crisis. These two crucial public moments – the final results of the City Council elections and the hiring of the city manager, both key moves on which not only the end of receivership but also the character of the city's future political culture depended – were the first road-tests for the vehicle that the Charter Preparation Team had designed, and for its credibility in the demanding environment of Chelsea politics.

*Seating the New Chelsea City Council:  
A Surprise Ending*

When the election returns came in the night of December 6, a disappointed Marta Rosa had missed gaining one of the three at-large seats on the new City Council, trailing by almost 500 votes the other School Committee member who sought to make his way up the electoral ladder, Harry German.<sup>209</sup> German, a 70-something Russian Jew whose name was pronounced with a hard "g" (like "guess"), was a champion of the city's elderly as well as a gadfly on a host of other issues, and Rosa later reflected that while in the past they had shared a base of support among Chelsea senior citizens, in this case they had competed for that base – and she had lost, fair and square.<sup>210</sup>

---

<sup>209</sup> While the winners of the three citywide spots were all white males, they also represented an intergenerational cross-section of the city's European constituencies, Paul Nowicki and Frank Zecha being the first- and second-place winners.

<sup>210</sup> Interview, April 6, 1995.

But German was highly unpredictable, except for the fact that he was always in motion. A longtime Chelsea activist, at times he seemed to operate at the center of an obsessive city-reform movement of one: possessed by near-demonic energy on Chelsea affairs, he attended almost every public meeting in the city with a sheaf of papers in manila envelopes, the result of his independent squirreling into public documents and records, from which he deduced a thicket of political relationships and elaborate scenarios. He took voluminous notes, and often rose to speak with prepared remarks that had been scribbled and corrected and rephrased in his tight angular cursive. A relentless crusader for whom the human lifespan seemed far too short to get to the bottom of the political deals determining his community's fate, he usually commented or questioned the speakers in a long rambling speeches, often drawing connections – ranging from the acute to the probabilistic to the incoherent – between political figures and public-policy actions. When he stepped to a microphone, local audiences took a deep breath and settled in for a long discourse, the line between perseverance and perseveration sometimes blurred in German's persistent engagement. He also took a gleeful child-like delight in being a *nudnik*, a pest, threatening anyone who tried to shorten his speeches, "the more you try to shut me up, the more I'll talk," and then giggling like a sassy kid at his own temerity.<sup>211</sup>

A longtime member of the Chelsea School Committee, German was a vigorous opponent of the BU contract, hounding the university's management team at its monthly meetings in the city; he was an equally

---

<sup>211</sup> Author's notes, Boston University Management Team meeting, Chelsea Public Library, May 17, 1994.

vigorous and long-winded supporter of the receivership's new-school construction program. The receivers themselves were not immune to his criticism, however. Alternately obsequious and accusatory, in any given public appearance German might thank them profusely for coming to Chelsea's rescue and then assail them for taking some action he regarded as unilateral or wrong-headed. German had a certain keen political insight mixed with a kind of narrative mania in which everything had a reason, a political history, an explanation that didn't always come through his breathless, chattering exposition. Reporters at the *Chelsea Record* and the Boston dailies both welcomed his tips – usually accurate – on Chelsea political news, and dreaded his calls, which could extend for an hour or more.

Although German largely supported the draft charter, he was enraged by one restrictive provision that would affect his political life dramatically: under the new charter, elected officials would not be allowed to sit on any of the city's other boards or commissions. German was in an unusual dual role, simultaneously a member of both the school board and Chelsea Conservation Commission. No conflict-of-interest issue had ever been raised, primarily because the School Committee had no direct budgetary or other voting role in the commission's matters. Moreover, the community had high regard for German's dedication to Chelsea affairs, however exhausting his expression of that dedication might be, and assumed him to be as incorruptible as he was idiosyncratic. At the last public review session on the draft charter, German said he was "indignant that I can't serve in two positions" and called the provision "a violation of [my] civil rights and the Constitution," although he backed down when the city solicitor told the audience that the language in the

then-proposed charter followed state law.<sup>212</sup> After the races for the new city council got underway, German declared himself a candidate, essentially daring the receiver to stop him from occupying both seats if he won.

Having won, he was faced with a brutal decision for which he did not seem to have prepared himself: whether to give up his seat on the Chelsea Conservation Commission for a place on the first Chelsea City Council.<sup>213</sup> As a Conservation Commission member, German had defined himself as the guardian of Chelsea's shores against assorted incursions, particularly the airport-related businesses no longer welcome on the East Boston side of the creek. Chelsea now was facing its first challenge from the private market to put airport-support facilities on the waterfront itself: having demolished its abandoned tanks, an oil company had sold the site to a developer who, with a lease in hand from a national car-rental agency to store vehicles there for quick shuttling to Logan, needed the approval of the Conservation Commission to proceed. German had been a primary obstacle to the permit's progress – at a January 1994 Planning Board meeting, he announced that he was ready to be arrested over the issue, threatening, "I'll be the Martin Luther King of Chelsea" – and some observers speculated that the charter provision had been designed specifically to move him out of the way.<sup>214</sup> The

---

<sup>212</sup> Author's notes, Chelsea Public Library, May 25, 1994.

<sup>213</sup> According to the web-site of the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions, Massachusetts invented the conservation commission in the late 1950s, with the explicit mandate to protect a municipality's natural resources, including open space and watershed management as well as land conservation. For waterfront communities around Boston Harbor, conservation commissions have been important gatekeepers for new development, especially because of the state's tidelands law which reserves public access to the mean high water mark; conservation commissions exert public control through issuing (or withholding) "Chapter 91" licenses. Conservation commission therefore have been among the most contentious forums for proposed land-use changes in the formerly industrial waterfront around the harbor.

<sup>214</sup> Don Harney, "Off-Airport Plan Produces Some Heated Exhaust: Residents Sound Off about 800 Cars," *Chelsea Record*, January 14, 1994, p. 1.

Conservation Commission vote was due to take place within weeks of the inauguration, forcing the issue of whether or not he would abandon his crusade at a crucial moment in order to fulfill his obligation to the voters who put him on the new council.

German agonized over the decision, and the man who previously had seemed to be everywhere at once virtually disappeared. At the inaugural ceremonies in early January, his seat sat conspicuously empty, the matter unresolved, rumors circulating through the Chelsea High School auditorium where Spence spoke sentimentally about this last rite of passage, both for himself as receiver and for the room itself, both of them soon to be replaced. Each speaker made the ritual acknowledgment of the forces of both continuity and change in Chelsea, while German's chair testified to his state of suspended animation. Some in the audience privately scoffed, guessing that German was using the Northeast Petroleum issue as a fig-leaf for his real dilemma: a prospective sudden shift in political role in which he would be forced, as Councilor German, to choose between two contenders for Council president. Connected to both families, politically and emotionally, perhaps he was unable to face that unanticipated difficulty.

But German's indecision raised another, more provocative issue at a delicate moment in the charter implementation process. As he was weighing his choice, he reported to be under direct pressure not to give up his City Council seat in order to prevent the ascension of the next candidate in line: Marta Rosa. German telephoned the Hispanic Commission about two weeks after the election and, according to the person who took the call, instead of accepting congratulations as the victor, reported with deep outrage that he



had received persistent appeals from a range of local elected officials and their proxies – appeals such as, " 'you can't resign and give Marta Rosa that seat...You're betraying us.' "<sup>215</sup> Now German's dilemma grew even more complex, with the prospect of a bitter succession battle that already had explicitly racial and ethnic overtones.

The receiver's office tried to make the decision for German, initiating his removal from the Conservation Commission in an effort to make his choice – and the gathering storm over his succession – a moot point. Finally, however, the councilor-elect renounced his own claim on the City Council position. At that point, the *sub-rosa* effort to keep Rosa from the seat became a more public campaign to vault fifth-place finisher Donald Jordan, a former alderman and a highly-visible charter opponent, into German's spot on the basis that one phrase in the charter was ambiguous on the matter of succession.<sup>216</sup> German's withdrawal set off a week of behind-the-scenes lobbying over conflicting interpretations of the charter language and whether or not it gave the City Council discretion in filling the seat – conversations approaching examinations of the framers' intent in US Supreme Court deliberations. Thus two passionate antagonists of the charter – and of each other – were now fully engaged in a near-talmudic debate over the integrity

---

<sup>215</sup> While the author was given this information off the record, it is important to note that the person at the Hispanic Commission end of the conversation was not Tito Rosa, Marta's husband.

<sup>216</sup> The charter specified that if a seat becomes vacant, the city council is required to choose "the defeated candidate" as long as that candidate secured at least 20 percent of the total votes cast. Rosa received almost 30 percent of the 4600 votes cast; Jordan tallied about 23 percent, about 500 fewer than Rosa, who beat him in each of the eight districts. Portnoy and other councilors wanted to place both names in nomination at the council, but the city solicitor ruled that the charter language clearly conveyed the intent of the CPT to give the next qualifying candidate the vacant seat. Ed Coletta, "German Refuses to Take Council Oath," *Chelsea Record*, December 21, 1994, p. 1; Christine Zybert, "Rosa Expected to Be Named to Council Seat," *Chelsea Record*, December 23, 1994, p. 3.

of the document both had opposed. Receivership staff was working overtime to preserve that integrity, ascribing to the pro-Jordan forces an intention, in McGoldrick's words, "to blow a hole in the charter."<sup>217</sup>

In Marta Rosa, the forces supporting Jordan had a smart, articulate, and tough-minded target – community-based by conviction, unrelenting by personality. As executive director of a child-care clearinghouse and advocacy group in Cambridge, Rosa was one of Chelsea's faces across the harbor, with strong links to major funders and community organizations outside the city. Rosa had helped take Mayor's Commission on Hispanic Affairs out of City Hall in 1988 to become a free-standing non-profit organization, and as its president she served as a frequent target of anti-immigrant animosity and rhetoric. Although she described making deliberate efforts to cultivate alliances on the School Committee, her relationship with Carlin was marked by mutual animosity, while Spence regarded her as an extremist incapable of compromise. She in turn regarded Spence with mistrust, as a smooth liberal fixer hired to placate but not to empower the Latino community.

After exhaustive scrutiny by lawyers and other advocates on both sides, Jordan finally conceded. Whatever the charter's textual ambiguities, mathematically, the voters had spoken: Rosa's district-by-district vote was well ahead of Jordan's. Even in the district of his staunch and outspoken ally Marilyn Portnoy, Jordan was dead last. In late December, Rosa was seated, effectively doubling Latino representation on the Chelsea City Council. Portnoy, the new council president, swore Rosa in – a symbolic pageant followed by *apologias* from those fellow councilors who had sought to deny

---

<sup>217</sup> Interview, February 2, 1995.

the fourth-place finisher her seat, forswearing any racial motivation for the challenge.

### *Selecting the New City Manager*

Once the matter of the vacant seat had been settled, the new City Council turned to its other sworn duties, the most compelling of those being the selection of the city's first city manager, a task members undertook with some urgency. At its first meeting in January 1995, district councilor Steve Powers put a screw-top wide-mouthed family-size mayonnaise jar, *sans* mayonnaise, on the table. Inside were four folded-up pieces of paper. Claiming that the bottle contained the names of the unofficial candidates for Chelsea city manager, Powers refused to identify them. It was a provocative gesture, stirring debate about whose candidacy was a foregone conclusion before the formal search process even started. It also was very clever. A veteran of some of the city's bloodiest pre-receivership wars for control of City Hall, Powers later confided that no names actually were written on the folded-up pieces of paper. But they had served their intended purpose: to trick other people into guessing whose names had been inscribed, and thus into revealing their own assumptions about who was in the running on the inside track, a collection of names ultimately including a variety of Chelsea political figures as well as the receiver, members of the receiver's staff, and – in some self-promoting cases – themselves.

With this unscientific but useful polling device, the search for the city's first city manager began, a six-month process that included training the council in its new duties, hiring a headhunting firm, an elaborate review of final

candidates, and a contentious public hearing on the final selection. Where the City Council elections were the first piece of public theater to play out the tensions between the pre- and post-receivership rules of the game, the city-manager hiring process projected those tensions onto an office that was yet uncharted territory. The Charter Preparation Team had left one critical criterion to the discretion of the new City Council in its hiring process: what, exactly, the prerequisites for the city-manager position would be. The charter-drafting group's debate over qualifications had reflected some members' lingering doubts about Chelsea's capacity for sustaining political change after the receiver departed – about whether it would revert to behind-the-scenes control by many of the same players as before the state took over. Divided by these issues, the CPT essentially had transferred the issue to the council where, not surprisingly, those apprehensions still percolated.

The debate over whether the City Council should consider any inside candidate was hardly a philosophical reflection on factionalism in the abstract. At its center was one particular local political figure and the question of whether the charter language had been written either to include or to exclude him: city tax assessor Guy Santagate, a former alderman who had a unique place in the city's political history and a personal story that began to dovetail with a tale of urban redemption for Chelsea. Santagate's one campaign for mayor in the 1960's had fizzled, by his account, when he refused to pay proper homage to the city's political establishment, marking the end of his career in electoral politics. He subsequently became one of the city's three tax assessors, a part-time position he held for a total of over 30 years. Despite daily opportunities to reward friends and punish enemies through the granting or withholding of abatements and other forms of favoritism, he

reputedly remained immune to the temptations of that office. It was not that he was off the grid, disconnected from the city's dense web of political relationships. However, unlike many others in the same environment, or in similar networks of memory, money, and obligation, Santagate apparently had sought no particular revenge through his bureaucratic discretion – means that others might have used to punish their enemies through manipulation of tax bills and refusals for tax relief.

Instead, the common theme across the city's constituencies echoed both receivers' firm statements about Santagate's exceptional probity. Carlin recalled that unlike most of the pre-receivership personnel in Chelsea City Hall, who he considered either "incompetent, corrupt, or lazy,"

...I'll hedge that by saying there were a few, that – this guy that just got appointed city manager, Santagate, I mean, my sense for Santagate on the Board of Assessors...[was t]hat he was honest and he was competent and he wasn't lazy. He would be one that would have fallen outside the generalization...I mean, the sense I had with him was that he wasn't a crook. That was a major qualification in those days. The guy wasn't a crook...[O]f the group over there, he was the most honest, the most competent, and he didn't appear to be lazy. He was working at State Street Bank and working in Chelsea. He honestly didn't appear to be lazy.<sup>218</sup>

Spence concurred, saying he was "convinced [that] Guy is clean as whistle...[N]obody ever said a word about Guy to me."<sup>219</sup> Santagate's vindication, long deferred, would come by other means.

Because of his early defeat in the Chelsea political job ladder, Santagate had followed a different career trajectory, into a managerial position in one of

---

<sup>218</sup> Interview, July 13, 1995.

<sup>219</sup> Interview, June 26, 1995.

Boston's major financial institutions and what one Boston political columnist habitually referred to as "the Dreaded Private Sector" – off the public payroll and its near-monthly collection of paid Monday holidays, in an institutional surround where politics presumably was constrained by the bottom line. In the context of the city's emergence from a cloud of administrative incompetence and malfeasance, this contrasting experience now accrued to Santagate's advantage. It made him a liminal figure, on the threshold between the "old" and the "new" Chelsea, with a foot in the modern world beyond the city limits as well as an intimate familiarity with and deep loyalty to his beleaguered hometown.

But the charter's oblique language about prerequisites and qualifications, reflecting the CPT's indecisive wrangling, left Santagate on the borderline:

The city manager shall be a person of proven administrative ability, especially qualified by education and training with five year's prior experience as a city or town manager, or an assistant city or town [manager] or the equivalent public sector experience (Section 4-1).

Was more than 20 years in a tax assessor's role "equivalent" to a background in public management? With this interpretive ambiguity left to the fledgling political process, the conflict over the most important criterion for Chelsea's new chief executive officer split the city yet again.

The fact that Santagate's name had come up *sotte voce* during the CPT's deliberations, and that it had come up again when Powers' jar elicited the list of potential candidates already firmly planted in Chelsea's political landscape, made some constituencies suspicious that the job had been designed and

reserved for him from the outset. Whatever his personal virtues, the idea that Santagate might have been written virtually into the charter itself was anathema to those who wanted to prolong the interruption of Chelsea's political business-as-usual. That the Latino activist community and its progressive allies held this view was predictable: while they held no particular grudges against Santagate, except to the extent that the city's tax structure had not deterred absentee landlords from abandoning their fire-prone buildings, the professionalization of city management was to them a way to confirm Chelsea's exit from its isolated and ingrown pool of regulars.

But a group which until then had been politically quiescent suddenly rallied in opposition to Santagate: the so-called "Chelsea yuppie" community, concentrated in the Admirals Hill condominium development on Boston Harbor but also in another brickfront enclave near the Chelsea waterfront. Some were Chelsea natives; others, from outside the city, sometimes were identified by the Boston real-estate press as "pioneers," as if at risk along a dangerous frontier. A handful among this group had participated previously in Chelsea public affairs, particularly over the disposition of certain urban-renewal parcels near Admirals Hill, and several had been recruited for boards and commissions during the receivership period, including seats on the Charter Preparation Team, as well as one staff position.

The City Council races and the prospect of choosing the first city manager catalyzed the group into becoming what Marilyn Contreas, the state's charter expert who had served on the CPT, described as a "political class."<sup>220</sup> The freshly-drawn district including Admirals Hill had just elected its first

---

<sup>220</sup> Interview, March 15, 1995.

resident to a district City Council seat – a Chelsea native, but one who shared the aspirations of a younger, more professional constituency newly aware of its interest in the city's future stability, as reflected in the value of their property – and Contreas detected a "shift on the part of the yuppies [who] suddenly decided to become part of Chelsea," predicting that the ultimate selection of the city-manager hiring process would depend on "what alliances [they formed] with the emerging Latino leadership."<sup>221</sup> This unprecedented coalition came together in opposition to Guy Santagate's nomination and in support of a credentialed and experienced city administrator. The Progressive-era notion of a bottom-line-oriented professional joined the respective interests of newer property-owners and activists who sought to prolong the decentralization of Chelsea's political capital.<sup>222</sup>

To collect names and conduct an initial screening of the city-manager candidates, the City Council hired an executive search firm, which culled resumés for the councilors' review and then performed background checks on three recommended finalists: all of them outside candidates, all white males, all with finance backgrounds, two with experience as assistant city or town managers. Meeting as a "committee of the whole," the council then wrestled publicly with the question of whether to add Santagate's name to the list, from which he had been conspicuously absent. Calls for a second legal opinion – about whether Santagate met the "equivalent public sector experience" requirement – were challenged as a stalling technique, while others highlighted the need to be hyper-vigilant about the process, so that no one could dispute the outcome. One councilor, openly in support of

---

<sup>221</sup> Interview, March 15, 1995.

<sup>222</sup> See Appendix A.



Santagate's candidacy, told his colleagues, "If you don't believe he has equivalent public-sector experience, don't vote for Mr. Santagate – vote for another candidate," adding with exasperation that the wording in the final charter effectively would exclude all private-sector talent: "We couldn't hire Lee Iacocca because he hadn't run Dixville Notch[, New Hampshire], or Westborough, Massachusetts, or Newburgh, New York."<sup>223</sup> Another pro-Santagate councilor threatened to "put a billboard in front of City Hall...[that says], 'If you come from Chelsea, you need not apply here, no matter who you are.' "<sup>224</sup> Ultimately, Santagate was added to the list and interviewed along with the other finalists in a crowded public session also broadcast, to an apparently wide audience, on Chelsea cable television.

Public sentiment clustered around two opposing *personas* for Santagate. In one characterization, he was a stand-in for the return and renewed dominance of old political networks, whose hallmarks were corruption and incompetence. In the other incarnation, he was the Biblical figure of Lot, the one honest man in Chelsea government, who could restore the city's integrity in the wake of the state's *deus ex machina* intervention. For his supporters, to hire another outside professional in the mold of the receiver and his staff would be to invite the invader back into the city's midst, another cold administrator willfully isolated from Chelsea history. Santagate, in this scenario, would redeem the city's history retroactively. By contrast, opponents

---

<sup>223</sup> Stanley Troisi, Chelsea City Council meeting, June 26, 1995, using as an example the well-known automobile executive who had convinced the federal government to rescue the Chrysler Corporation from bankruptcy in 1979 with \$1.5-billion in federal loan guarantees. Although many Americans objected to using public funds to bail out a private company, Iacocca became a popular symbol of the decisive and strategic CEO, and even toyed with running for president. Dixville Notch is the tiny New Hampshire town where the first votes in the nation traditionally are counted in presidential elections.

<sup>224</sup> Stephen Powers, City Council meeting, June 26, 1995.

to Santagate as a link to the leadership of pre-receivership Chelsea advocated for an outside professional very much in the mold of the receiver and his staff, to fully modernize the city and to immunize it against the return to old political and fiscal habits.

The role of the receiver in the decision-making process was a matter of some local contention. Many assumed that Spence had his thumb on the scale as the City Council weighed Santagate's candidacy. But Spence was officially absent and privately ambivalent about the outcome, although some members of his top staff felt strongly that the first city manager should be a person with previous training and experience in that professional role – experience if not as a city manager, then in the public sector, and somewhere other than Chelsea. From the sidelines, Carlin was characteristically impatient with the public process, calling it a "big mistake:"

One of the things that I said to Spence that he didn't accept (and by the way, that's his job – I mean, his decision) is that the receiver should have appointed the first city manager...Because if the first city manager fails, Chelsea is in the history book. Do you think the state will put it through another receivership? No. And I said to Spence, I said, "Harry, tell them all to go to hell. Tell them you're the receiver and part of the new governing scheme was to be the first city manager who will be appointed [for] five years, [and who] will be your appointment. At the end of five years, then the City Council can take over and [appoint] city managers." Big, big mistake not to do that.<sup>225</sup>

Unpredictably, it was a piece of bad financial news from the receiver's office that ultimately tipped the scale in Santagate's favor. As Spence prepared to turn the city back over to civilian government, a budget gap of over \$1 million loomed, a discrepancy attributed to an arithmetical error on the part

---

<sup>225</sup> Interview, July 13, 1995.

of his chief financial officer, who subsequently left Chelsea City Hall before the rest of his cohort. That the city's annual budget had ballooned from \$40 million to \$65 million over the course of the receivership already had raised questions from skeptics, including Carlin, about the city's future viability, and the unexpected deficit suggested the early onset of fiscal fragility.<sup>226</sup> Although a one-time infusion of capital closed the immediate gap, the city had an uneasy sense that the receiver had left unfinished business – and that even the outside professionals were susceptible to budgetary mistakes. Chelsea's favorite son certainly could do no worse than the know-it-alls. Moreover, since Santagate was the only city-manager candidate to mention the deficit during the interview process, he thereby took on the mantle of a leader who tells painful truths and faces them squarely – rendering him a sort of local Italo-American late-century FDR.

Several speakers echoed this point in the crowded and emotional public session before the council's final vote. Donald Jordan, the Vote No activist and former alderman who had been the unsuccessful challenger for Harry German's vacant City Council seat, first formulated the argument:

Watching the interviews, one candidate stuck out – Guy Santagate. He was the only candidate who told the financial truth about the city...What the state

---

<sup>226</sup> Although in 1992 Carlin had told *Globe* reporter McGrory about Spence, "He's a 10," ("How to Save a City," June 28, 1992), in 1995 he had a different provisional grade (on an idiosyncratic 1-to-10 scale) for Spence: "If those books are balanced over there in Chelsea and they don't have a deficit, on a scale of zero to ten – if they don't have a deficit, I'd give Harry a 9.5 because he did a lot of other things...Now, if they're \$2 million in debt, he gets a 1.5 because the whole proposition of the receivership wasn't to socially re-engineer the community. The process was to get them financially on their feet and if they're not on their feet, he should be embarrassed. And I'm not talking about bookkeeping, blue smoke and mirrors. I'm talking about legitimate. That's to me, and maybe I'm narrow...but to me that's the defining issue. If the books are balanced and you could lay out three or four years ahead that they're going to stay balanced" was his strict measure of success. Interview, July 13, 1995.

accomplished [during receivership...was] the same thing the mayors did [*i.e.*, overspending the budget]. That's what I want for Chelsea: someone who will be truthful to us.<sup>227</sup>

Another Vote No activist, James Dwyer, outlined Santagate's relevant training and experience:

There is only one candidate...with a working knowledge of city, [who] can take the ball and start running with it the first day...Guy Santagate has dedicated his adult life to Chelsea. When the [first] receiver came in, he let go 14 out of 17 department heads, [but there was] never a scandalous tone about that man [*i.e.*, Santagate]. He doesn't need a six-month course on Chelsea. If you people vote for anybody besides Guy Santagate, you will absolutely be doing an injustice to the city of Chelsea.

The first speaker from Admirals Hill, Ken Bunelli, also had watched the interviews on cable and agreed that Santagate stood out: "I think Mr. Santagate has incredible credentials," said Bunelli, a Chelsea resident since 1988, "[but] not for this job." Another Admirals Hill resident, Robert Henthorn, maintained that of the "four excellent candidates, [there is] one that stands out, with a masters from Columbia in planning and business" – finalist Donald Jacobs. Citing Jacobs' combined experience as a town manager and in banking," Henthorn added, "Why don't you want to put someone with credentials in that job?"

The debate became quite heated when another resident of the Chelsea waterfront district, Erin Delancy, took her turn at the microphone to say, "I don't know any of the candidates personally, [but] I felt Jacobs stood out," and to ask, "What measure is being taken to make sure don't the city won't fall

---

<sup>227</sup> All quotes in this section are from the author's notes, City Council meeting, June 26, 1995, unless otherwise identified.

into old-style politics?" Her general question provoked a sarcastic response from School Committee Anthony (Chubby) Tiro, who noted that the hearing had drawn "the greatest representation I have ever seen from Admirals Hill" at a public meeting in Chelsea. Tiro then declared himself "p.o.'d" [*i.e.*, "pissed off"] at Delancy's comment about "old-style Chelsea politics," and launched into a tirade:

If you don't like Chelsea, get the hell out. [For] God's sakes, there's thievery in every city, there's corruption in every town. They found it in Chelsea and we weeded it out. Now we're supposed to go on. The scars are there, but the wounds have healed...I have a personal preference [for] Guy Santagate, not because he's Guy Santagate...[but because he is] a former citizen, he would move back, he knows this city, and in order to do something in this city, you better know it. He's the only one [among the candidates] who addressed problems of city finances [in his interview], he knows next year is already \$1.7 million short.

Tiro closed with an appeal to the committee: "Vote with your heart as well as your conscience...and no matter which way you vote, don't use the phrase 'old-style politics' and let it influence your vote."

Despite Tiro's protest, other longtime Chelsea residents expressed their doubts about the wisdom of hiring an insider, however individually trustworthy. Henry Leah, one of the city's dedicated meeting-goers, noted, "That's how the city got in trouble – we let friendship get in the way of the city." Another regular, Andrea Watson, warned that the protracted exercise of justifying Santagate's candidacy was "getting out of hand. It's embarrassing. Everyone is watching, they're laughing. I'm ashamed to say I'm from Chelsea. Get it together, do right by the city, do it in an honorable way."

When Santagate at last was voted in, those councilors who had cast their

ballot for Jacobs, the other finalist, formally switched their vote in a show of solidarity, to make it a unanimous selection by acclamation. For the swearing-in on July 14, the elevator in City Hall at last was ready, so that the city could gather in the new City Council chambers, which featured pink panels with gilt trim and a clock with a circle of letters in place of numbers, spelling out "Boost Chelsea." In his inaugural address, Santagate borrowed from Dickens to call Chelsea "a city of two tales" – one the well-known caricature of its undeniable troubles, the other an ignored, unreported portrait of its true character.<sup>228</sup> It was a brilliant narrative re-capturing of the city. Spence had said that when it came time for the receiver to go, he hoped that so much of the democratic process would have been restored to the city that no one would notice the difference.<sup>229</sup> In the inaugural moment, Santagate made sure everyone would notice the difference. He took not only administrative but narrative control, wresting from Spence both the political and the moral authority of the corner office in Chelsea City Hall, and reclaiming the history of the city's rise, fall, and redemptive recovery.

---

<sup>228</sup> Author's notes, inaugural address, July 14, 1995 (Bastille Day, appropriate to the *A Tale of Two Cities* analogy).

<sup>229</sup> "Spence Becomes Receiver Today," *Chelsea Record*, November 18, 1992, p. 1.



## IV. LITERATURE REVIEW: PLANNING & NARRATIVE

### *Introduction:*

#### *Planning Theory & Narrative Theory*

Recent planning theory has emphasized the "rhetorical" (Throgmorton 2000), "interactive" (Innes 1995), and "deliberative" (Forester 1999) dimensions of planning practice, based on a re-definition of practice as a form of "communicative action" (Habermas 1984, Innes 1995, 1998; Forester 1989, 1993, 1999; Mandelbaum *et al.* 1996). In this new environment, "communicative rationality" (Innes 1995, 1998; Forester 1993) has broadened the palette of information considered useful, emphasizing the validity of experiential knowledge (often conveyed through narrative) and exposing the processes by which quantitative as well as qualitative data become embedded in institutions through dialogue. Research has turned toward not only the close observation of practitioners at work but also planners reflecting on their practice as ways of deriving theory inductively from "what planners do:" from their accounts of what kind of knowledge they put into what kind of action (Innes 1995; Forester 1994, 1995, 1999; Healey 1992). In addition, communicative practice advocates a procedural commitment to narrative-rich consensus-building processes in an effort to make participation more equitable, more genuinely participatory, and more productive (Innes 1995, 1998; Forester 1989, 1993, 1999; Healey 1992; Mandelbaum *et al.* 1996; others).

Thus after many years on the sidelines in the planning literature, narrative has come to center stage as both an instrument of practice and a focal point of



research and theory-building. Where not long ago theory was "a prestigious and restrictive term" whose "rhetorical standards could not be satisfied by even a carefully crafted narrative of practical events, and certainly not by an everyday story," the more recent "talk" of planning theory is marked by "archetypes, abstract symbolic and iconic models, tacit protocols, stories, conventionalized dilemmas,...and all the tropes beloved of rhetoricians" – thick, practice-oriented talk "not soaring over the field but contending for attention on the ground" (Mandelbaum *et al.* 1996:xiii-xv).

In this convergence of planning and narrative inquiry, however, the dilemmas of narrative also pertain. Enthusiasm for empirical narrative has surfaced in the planning literature at a point when such narratives have become thoroughly suspect. Paradoxically, the reasons for enthusiasm and suspicion are related: the postmodern rejection of any absolute knowledge from an Archimedean point, demoting both the omniscient observer of history and the disinterested exemplar of technical rationality from their previous positions of privileged objectivity. The authority of technical rationality (and technical experts) as a decision-maker's unquestionable source of unbiased guidance having been undermined, planning practice has been re-conceptualized as "more than anything, an interactive, communicative activity" (Innes 1995:184) in which decisions emerge from "[s]ocial processes [which] turn information into meaningful knowledge and knowledge into action" (Innes 1995:185):

This shift of attention reflects the retreat from the positivist tradition with its emphasis on the sole validity of objectified, systematized knowledge coupled with a clear separation of facts from values. We now appreciate that technical knowledge is inevitably infused with biases reflecting particular interpretive predilections and normative values...Systematized, rationally grounded knowledge is now understood to be only one among several knowledge forms

(Healey 1992:9).

However, the breakdown between fact and value has rattled all the "human sciences" with the "problem of representation" (White 1989:ix – *i.e.*, the irresolvable dilemma of how to represent experience immediately rather than intermediately), eroding the barrier between fact and fiction and raising new questions: "[T]hat the historian's 'empirical' account and the novelist's imaginative story *share* the narrative form is, on reflection, rather startling...Does the first mimic the second, or vice versa?" (Bruner 1990:55). In announcing that texts of all kinds have a delusionary aspect, perpetrating the polite fraud that they reflect an independent reality rather than a contingent interpretation of some sub-set of events, postmodernism defamed the conventions of empirical narrative, offering in their stead the unreliability of any narrator, the incompleteness of any story, the incommensurability of any set of stories emerging from (or even within) diverse communities, and the ineptitude of language in overcoming that incommensurability.

For a field so dependent on stories for transmitting knowledge – through case studies, through place-based and topical histories, through anecdote – planning came comparatively late to appreciating not only the signal virtues but also the formal anxieties about empirical narratives and the nature of language that have swept through other academic circles. Since planning is no single discipline but instead a platform for action opportunistically connected to an array of other academic fields, it has been sideswiped by the philosophical confrontations in architecture, anthropology, sociology, history, economics, law, organizational management, and philosophy itself over the past several decades. In a sense, the postmodern preoccupations of others

have been thrust onto planners, both in theory and in practice (Beauregard 1989, Milroy 1991, Forester 1993, Innes 1995, Sandercock *et al.* 1995b, Sandercock 1998, Harper & Stein 1996).

But to the extent that planners claim to apply knowledge to action, they cannot avoid the debates about what permits them to make that claim, and the planning literature has re-framed these debates in light of the special demands of the field (Milroy 1991, Harper & Stein in Mandelbaum *et al.* 1996, Beauregard 1989, Forester 1993). The new focus on narrative has crystallized a set of communicative challenges for planning practice and theory, as well as the profession's own historiography: differential access to information and the planner's role in mediating that access (Forester 1989, 1993; Innes 1995, 1998); the production, validation, and transfer of information (Innes 1995, 1998; Forester 1993); the planner's role as "persuasive storyteller" (Throgmorton 1992, 1993b, 1996, 2000; Mandelbaum 1991, 1996, 2000); the impact of metaphor on planning discourse (Beauregard 1993, 1995); the place of narrative in democratic deliberation (Forester 1994, 1995, 1999); the paradoxes of narrative control and transformation in mediation (Forester 1989, 1999; Cobb 1994, 2000); and "suppressed" and "insurgent" histories of planning as well as "voices from the borderlands" of marginalized communities (Sandercock, ed., 1995; Sandercock 1997, 1998; Thomas 1994; Woods 1998).

Theory must address the changed premises of practice, and vice versa; both endow planners with greater responsibilities to the multi-vocal dimensions of their work, particularly in the diverse context of American cities. But in the context of postmodernism, where no path is privileged through the thicket of

interpretation and where all paths may lead to dead ends, if neither qualitative nor quantitative knowledge can be regarded as "true," how are planners to proceed? Empirical narrative presents a particularly serious problem. The end of positivist certainties has bequeathed a gnawing epistemological dilemma to the human encounter with historical knowledge: as White has argued (1989:147, paraphrasing Jameson), history has a real and not imagined referent, but it is inaccessible except in textual form (including a spoken account of that history, susceptible to the selectiveness of personal memory as well as the other discriminations of narrative choice). That textual screen leaves historical discourse on the same level as any other rhetorical performance, with a status no more or less authoritative than what normally is regarded as the discrete domain of literature: that is, inherently fictional, for "[h]ow else can any past, which by definition comprises events, processes, structures, and so forth, considered no longer perceivable, be represented...except in an 'imaginary' way?" (White 1989:57).

Rather than considering these conditions as insuperable constraints that risk paralyzing action, however, another strategy is to enlist both the powers of imagination and the techniques of literature in order to fully appreciate the data that narratives carry – to design a methodology for narrative analysis that draws out their meaning as human artifacts and as institutional products. The first step to linking planning theory and narrative theory instrumentally is to permit the re-entry of imagination, through a constructivist view of human learning, of the role of both invention and experience in that process, of the navigational path through patterns and analogies, and of the nature of the narrative impulse.

*Planning & Narrative*  
*A Constructivist View*

Constructivism offers a way to negotiate the difficult territory of postmodernism, by acknowledging the extent to which the human apparatus relies on a process of navigation through new ideas and experiences by reference to patterns and analogies, including metaphor. Building on the original work of Jean Piaget with young children, the constructivist approach emphasizes the role of invention in understanding and learning. In place of objectivity stands the principle of "subject/object unity," in which an active human mind transforms whatever is seen or experienced in the process of apprehending it. There are no perfect copies of information, but rather new knowledge assimilated via logical structures shaped by experience.

Psychologist Jerome Bruner marked this distinction by contrasting two phrases commonly used to describe cognition: between "the *processing* of information," a computation-derived image in which the mind responds according to pre-established rules, and "the *construction* of meaning," where the mind's role is active and meaning is not "preassigned."<sup>230</sup> At the same time, he argued that meaning is "public and communal rather than private and autistic," and the construction of meaning is not entirely random (1990:33).

In his studies of childhood development, Piaget recognized the role of patterns in "exploiting correlations built by experience and repetition into the structure and functioning of our brains."<sup>231</sup> Out of such correlations come

---

<sup>230</sup> *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 4-5, italics in the original.

<sup>231</sup> Irving E. Sigel, David M. Brodzinky, Roberta M. Golinkoff, *New Directions in Piagetian*

human abilities (and perhaps also the limits of human abilities) to negotiate the outside world, directly or metaphorically. Narrative, in this constructivist framework, serves as a chronicle of learning, of meaning under construction, whose status at any given moment reflects the ongoing invention of a scenario out of disparate data, a story which each new element then confirms (by appearing to fit into a larger pattern and sequence) or challenges (by apparently refusing to fit, thereby raising questions about the integrity either of the existing narrative or of the new data).

Bruner also regards narrative as a form of "social negotiation" (1990:55), arguing that the human "push" toward narrative is so strong that children learn the grammatical rules of language in the order in which these structures and sequences allow them to tell stories that contextualize their actions (1990:77 and *passim*). He observes that children begin to construct narrative in service of their "earliest efforts to indicate, label, request, and mislead" – a means not merely of recording but also of legitimizing behavior and choice, and thereby manipulating reaction (1990:71). They learn perspective and voice from hearing their experience described in terms different from their own interpretation or interest, so understanding that stories are partisan, "designed to put the case if not adversarially at least convincingly [on] behalf of a particular interpretation" (1990:85). They also learn that contextualizing the unusual or defiant event often has a peacekeeping function, family communication becoming the template for the political as well as the expository function of narrative. This, Bruner argues, is the basis of narrative form and purpose: stories occur at the juncture of the ordinary and the extraordinary, the normal and the transgressive: they

---

*Theory and Practice* (Hillsdale NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1981), pp. 51-2.

explain the departure from the norm and, when necessary, how that gesture acquires meaning and justification.

Bruner identified four basic prerequisites as the threshold conditions for a child's conceptualization of a story:

It requires, first, a means for emphasizing human action or "agentivity" – action directed towards goals controlled by agents. It requires, secondly, that a sequential order be established and maintained – that events and states be "linearized" in a standard way. Narrative, thirdly, also requires a sensitivity to what is canonical and what violates canonicity in human interaction. Finally, narrative requires something approximating a narrator's perspective: it cannot, in the jargon of narratology, be "voiceless" (1990:77).

These four requirements reflect back the conditions of both comprehending and composing a story, and they highlight the paradoxical dangers of coherence: the formal qualities that make the story make sense also are what make it fundamentally artificial. The more seamless the assembly of the narrative building blocks, the more credible and indeed life-like the narrative appears. Thus, once Bruner's conditions are met, the armature of the narrative protects its "facticity" (that is, its correspondence with a verifiable set of circumstances) unless the audience is armed with empirical questions from outside the narrative system now in place.

The argument that participants (and observers) engage in an incremental and iterative process of scenario-building which also relies on the cognitive triangulation of figurative language is of constructivist intent. It is not that these scenarios, under the gratuitous and wayward influence of rhetorical tropes, distort some thus-impaired Platonic "real" story, nor that the assembling of narrative is predictable or pre-determined. Rather, this

approach to analysis of empirical narratives contends that each participant (and observer) builds a provisional scenario out of the available data through a constructivist process, bringing their prior experience and narratives about that experience to bear on the judgments that they must make in order to make sense of those data – a continuous form of "action research."<sup>232</sup> The dissertation hypothesizes that in those bringing-to-bear process, there are patterns of interpretation which structure, reinforce, and reveal an analysis of the institutional environment; those patterns are identified and discussed in more detail in Chapter V.

---

<sup>232</sup> The notion of a "provisional" story is an adaptation of what Mattingly called the "prospective story" (1989:25). Mattingly laid out the iterative process of establishing and then revising what she called a "prospective story" out of a set of historical and preliminary data – how the narrative process operated in the setting she studied. She monitored how practitioners (in her case, occupational therapists) posed a prospective story derived from past professional experiences and stereotypical scenarios (comparing the given situation with aspirational best-practices or cautionary worst-practices), projected onto new clinical situations in order "to provide some answer, however provisional, to the question: what story am I in?" To emphasize its both rational and fragile (although often vigorously defended) fix on a given situation, here it is called the *provisional* story, subject to further reinforcement or subsequent destabilization by new data.



## NARRATIVE ANALYSIS IN THE PLANNING LITERATURE

The planning field's increasing focus on narrative has been derived at least in part from the literature and practice of alternative dispute resolution, which led the way for the field over the past two decades. The following section conducts a brief review of the narrative issues that arise within negotiation and mediation practice. The subsequent section addresses two trends in the planning literature: the re-discovery of rhetoric, both as figurative language and as argumentation, and the place of narrative in the larger framework of communicative rationality.

### *Negotiation & Narrative*

Perhaps because its practitioners depend so heavily on the spoken word, negotiation theory long has regarded issues of language and narrative interpretation as matters of professional practice. Less codified than formal legal procedures but more structured and consensus-based (that is, less majoritarian) than prior community-participation processes, negotiation and mediation occur as a stylized dialogue in a theatrical setting, unfolding as performances in real time, each party to the dispute in turn organizing and reorganizing the tale. With intellectual roots in critical legal studies, methods and theory have been recruited from the disciplines of psychology and social relations, from linguistics and literature, and from the post-structuralist strains of anthropology to uncover and examine the parties – including the negotiators and mediators – at work: the language they use as well as the institutional and cultural context in which all the participants are embedded as they undertake the deceptively simple task of face-to-face storytelling (Cobb

1991, 1993, 1994, 2000; Menkel-Meadow 1995; Cicourel 1988; Firth, ed., 1995).

Like planning, negotiation can be hard to pin down as a single activity or set of ideas. In formal terms, negotiation refers to "a problem-solving encounter," a specific professional activity further defined as "a communicative attempt to accommodate potential or real differences in interests in order to make mutually acceptable decisions on substantive matters" (Firth 1995:11, 7). Thus the negotiation process is often presented as a microcosm of social decision-making. One participant in a mediated dispute between university administrators and community residents over the uses of federal research funds delineated what else was at stake besides money, the boundaries of academic research, and the dimensions of community input:

At issue as well were certain interpretations of social reality, the legitimacy of the activities and good faith of the negotiators on both sides, and what might be called a lien on the shape of the future (Moore 1985:29).<sup>233</sup>

At the level of language, and "in quite implicit ways,"

negotiation activity implicates the discourse process itself, revolving around such things as the acceptability of categories used to describe objects or concepts, and the veridicality of facts, reasons or assessments. Negotiation on these processual and more covert features have profound effects on final outcomes and definitive arrangements (Firth 1995:7).

---

<sup>233</sup> Sally Falk Moore, "Dividing the Pot of Gold: Social and Symbolic Elements in an Instrumental Negotiation," *Negotiation Journal*, January 1985, p. 29. In contrast to her acute observations, a derogatory tone seeps through the case study of the dispute, in which she also played a role as a university negotiator. She raises questions about the legitimacy of the community's concerns, and even though she describes what could be seen at least to some extent as a "social learning" process, her frustration with gestures, demands, and actions that she saw as "merely" symbolic seems to have overshadowed the potential for reciprocal learning – why community residents had the mistrust they displayed, what happened as *both* sides became more educated about the operational as well as the political and institutional issues.

Across the social sciences, the word "negotiation" itself has become a metaphor for the joint construction of meaning, used "to stress that the essential nature of a phenomenon is...its contingent mutability, its situated emergence, and its intersubjective interpretation – each symbiotically accomplished through interactive processes" (Firth 1995:10). Cobb has called on the field, particularly educators, to develop a level of self-consciousness about this part of its task:

[A]s the field of negotiation moves to address interpretative...processes, our focus is increasingly on the nature of the inquiry that enables reflection on the stories we tell...Negotiation pedagogy can thus be seen as a second-order practice of learning how to help others *negotiate* the stories they tell – how to navigate the intersubjective space where meaning itself emerges...in ways that favor strategic competency as well as interpretative competency... (Cobb 2000:317, emphasis in the original).

In observing practitioners as pioneers in narrative, the negotiation and mediation literature has identified some key narrative dilemmas that arise in that professional context, particularly the contradictions related to narrative responsibilities within a consensus-building process. For example, despite the commonly-held assumptions that the mediator's role is to manage an "empowerment" process, leveling power relationships, Cobb observed that among mediators she interviewed, their own accounts of their practice revealed that they were unwittingly "usurping disputants' rights to account for their own actions, to construct their own stories" (1994:248). Moreover, their convictions that they were managing a process while leaving content undisturbed proved illusory (1994:248-9), if not impossible:

Mediators [interviewed] make a clear distinction between managing the process

and managing the content of the dispute – the former is considered empowering and the latter, disempowering...[However], Forester (1990:15) notes that public[-]policy mediation requires that mediators "probe issues...in ways that enable parties to reformulate their own interests, needs and well-being" – that is, mediators intervene in the content of the dispute (1993:250).

Cobb repudiates the distinction between content and process, stating openly that "mediators are in the business of constructing a reality with disputants. There is no escape from discourse: [i]t is the medium in which disputes are constructed and altered" (1993:255). Instead, she re-directs attention to mediators' responsibility of such intervention at the level of narrative:

In mediation, narrative closure or coherence is problematic because it stabilizes the description of the problem in ways that delimit its transformation. If we assume that persons come to mediation due to protracted and irascible conflicts, then we can also assume that there are a limited number of ways that the problem has been "storied" by participants...If we accept these assumptions, mediation becomes a struggle to destabilize conflict narratives, a struggle to open up stories to alternative meanings and interpretations (1993:250-1).

From a mediation perspective, Cobb proposes not merely respectful attention (or what Forester calls "diplomatic recognition") of contrary narratives but an affirmative professional responsibility to "destabilize" closed narratives, to disrupt them in useful ways, opening them up to "alternative meanings and interpretations" and thereby to a problem-solving mode, dislodged from "the limited number of ways that the problem has been 'storied' by participants..."

Constructivism, then, permits the building of narratives as a record of the process of learning – that is, of making individual sense; mediation proposes intervention in participants' narrative construction and therefore wreaking the possibility of making a different kind of collaborative sense. Both underlie

the theory of communication-centered practice, which is founded on both individual and joint learning processes. The review now turns to two other important elements: the re-discovery of rhetoric and a working definition of communicative rationality.

### *The Re-Discovery of Rhetoric*

Accompanying the turn toward communication-centered practice has been renewed attention to rhetoric as the art of persuasion, particularly as embodied in figurative language and strategies of argumentation (Throgmorton 1992, 1993b, 1996, 2000; Mandelbaum 1991, 2000; Beauregard 1989; Healey 1992, 1997). Throgmorton and Mandelbaum have taken tactical approaches to the rhetorical management of narrative conflict, while Healey and Beauregard bring a more critical awareness of how "assumptions and meanings may carry power relationships or structure within them. In turn, the way communicative acts are created and used helps sustain or challenge power structures" (Healey 1992:10).

The power of language to mobilize meaning is most immediately evident in the figures of speech that approach cliché – that is, images that are so common that they are not often re-examined with care (Lakoff and Johnson 1981). In his book *Voices of Decline*, planning theorist Robert Beauregard challenged planners with "the possibility that urban decline is a negotiated understanding" (1993:328) rather than an objective condition, despite (or because of) its centrality in planning, and that the familiar phrases denoting urban growth and decay themselves must be checked for their assumptions about cause, agency, and responsibility. "Urban theorists argue about the

forces causing the growth and decline of cities," he pointed out, " but very rarely, if at all, reflect on how rhetorical inventions influence their interpretations" (1993:ix), observing that in encountering such language,

we experience not an emotionally flat rendition of objectively[-]specified conditions but highly[-]charged stories built up of layers of personal and collective meanings[,],... a social and literary construction in which issues of rhetoric and discourse cannot be ignored...This puts the conditions of the city...in a very different light from that proposed by positivists utilizing quantitative analysis...[T]he real issue, the most perplexing problem,...[is] how we represent 'the data' " (1993:37, 328).

These are not just æsthetic choices, but fundamental ways in which "the discourse functions ideologically to shape our attention,...the ways in which [it] prescribes actions, legitimates conditions, and reconciles responsibilities..." (1993:ix, 9). While decay of the American city has presented a ready motive for flight and justification of neglect, Beauregard argued, it also has served as a rationale for the spatial and moral distance between suburban residents and inner-city minorities. "Beginning with John Winthrop's 'citty on the hill,' this country's cities have been ensnared in an ethical discourse..." and particularly in the latter half of the twentieth century, "[u]rban decline and race bec[a]me intertwined as cause and consequence" (284, 285). In this discursive short-hand, full-blown narratives are compressed into the linguistic unit, or euphemism, of "urban decline."

In "Telling Stories" (1991), Mandelbaum explored how narratives both maintain and divide communities, with pressures on planners to resolve conflicting accounts, turning to rhetoric as a potential source of reconciliation in a postmodern Babel:

Whenever we argue about planning choices, we are bound to struggle with competing stories, seeking to resolve differences so as to mobilize resources and consent...As members of overlapping communities within a pluralistic field, how do we preserve incommensurable meanings and accounts of the world when resolute action seems so often to demand that we settle on a single Truth? (1991:211, as capitalized in the original).

He then identified five rhetorical devices that planners might use to manage this tension. Two such strategies use the "plain" narrative voice either to construct "a regime of fact" that seems to stand apart from interpretation, or to synthesize a seamless third story out of two conflicting accounts (1991:211). Two other mechanisms are more procedural: turning to an authoritative process (usually legal) to resolve the dispute over facts, or disengaging from the dispute entirely (1991:211). In the name of diversity, his "last argumentative strategy embraces controversy rather than seeking either to resolve or ignore it" (1991:212).

Other than an exhausted appeal to "agreeing to disagree" (1991:212), however, Mandelbaum's fifth narrative option does not offer a practical technique for "embracing" multiple narratives. While "appreciation of [narrative] conflict may seem compelling in the abstract," he warned that a planner committed to "very difficult" enactment of narrative multiplicity in practice would "quickly discover that she is vulnerable to manipulation:"

Every tale and every narrator claims a share of the protective mantle; every practice is represented as a "culture" commanding respect; every lexical difference, a signal from an endangered stakeholder (1991:212, 213).

His implicit conclusion is that the position of remaining open to the crossfire of stories may be philosophically necessary but proves impossible in practice,

while the other four stances are philosophically less tenable but represent the planner's only workable choices.

Throgmorton, by contrast, maintains an abiding faith in the power of language and the planner's role in manipulating it properly. Proclaiming that "[p]lanning is a thoroughly rhetorical activity" (1993b:334), he is a full-throated advocate for renewing the field's attention to rhetoric as a lost or much-diminished ingredient of practice, championing efforts to rescue the word from association with "empty" and the resulting tendency to regard rhetoric as "trivial or invidious" (1996:345). "Rather than thinking of rhetoric as gloss or seduction," he proposes, "let us regard it as the study and practice of persuasion" (1996:345), amending its status as an "extremely important but essentially neglected or marginalized part of the planning process" (2000:367). Concurrently, he has re-defined the role of planners as "not heroic experts, but as *skilled-voices-in-the-flow*" (2000:367, italics in the original) of persuasive argument, depicting planners as rhetorical activists engaged in "persuasive storytelling about the future,...future-oriented storytellers who write persuasive texts that other people read (construct and interpret) in diverse and often conflicting ways" (1992:17). In his zeal, however, he muddies the definition of trope and overlooks the potential for rhetorical manipulation in its more "invidious" sense.

Throgmorton uses the term "trope" itself in diverse and often conflicting ways, alternately at the scale of a word or phrase and at the scale of a whole document. At one moment he adopts a traditional definition, describing how trope as a unit of figurative language or argumentation "connects intimately with narrative:"



At the heart of persuasion are the use of *tropes*. These are any literary or rhetorical device – such as metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony – that involves using words in other than their literal sense (Quinn 1982). As a word, *trope* implies a turn on or toward something, a turn induced by the device itself. When we weave such tropes together into a larger planning narrative, we are engaging in persuasive discourse (1996:346, italics in the original).

At another, he argues that a whole document occupies the place of a single rhetorical device, and narrative similarly inflates:

...[P]lanning tools, such as survey research, computer modeling, and forecasting can be thought of as rhetorical tropes; that is figures of speech and argument that give persuasive power to the larger narratives of which they are a part. As rhetorical tropes used in practice, planning tools also construct the planners' character and the kinds of communities that are formed between planners and their audiences (1993b:334).

This is trope as a metaphor for trope – a document as a single figure of speech, not within a continuous narrative but presumably within a longer, discontinuous campaign of representation. Such a shift of scale occurred, for example, in the language of his case study of a utility company's efforts to preserve its Chicago monopoly, when he argued that a controversial "survey acted as a trope in a larger narrative about the desirability of the city 'taking over' [the company's] electric-power system" (1993:341). This more abstract usage is confusing as well as superficial, especially when set against his argument later in the same piece that the phrase " 'taking over' " itself is one of several tropes in the survey's language.

His analysis is more credible when it is restricted to the examination of trope at its smaller scale, noting ambiguities in interpretation of the survey's

wording – for instance, that the phrase "the city" rang differently to different constituencies (to the business community, the phrase connoted a municipal administration it regarded as overly aggressive; to members of the mayor's Energy Task Force, it denoted the populace of the whole municipality). Because "[t]his trope radically transformed the context and meaning of the city's actions," Throgmorton argued that "the case also shows the importance of speaking with awareness of differing or opposing views, and how particular audiences can – due to the inherent plasticity of language – read meanings into [such instruments as] surveys that differ from the one intended by the survey's client or researchers." (1996: 356, 357).

It would be an unremarkable statement of the obvious except that another set of examples from the survey's language raises questions of intent to exploit this "plasticity" – questions Throgmorton does not address. Pointing out that the survey had referred to a report on policy options as the city's "plan" (as if a course of action already had been chosen), had claimed that local businesses would be "required" to conform to a new regulatory regime (as opposed to a voluntary incentive scheme included among the options), and had framed the project as the city's prospective "takeover" of the private electric-power system (as if implying that the city were proposing to "expropriate property"), he presents these choices of language as evidence of a verbal representation that "belied its [*i.e.*, the survey's] tropal nature" (1996:355). Throgmorton seems to be satisfied that this language supports his portrayal of the survey as a trope, ignoring what appears to be an instance of reversion to the more "invidious" uses of rhetoric.

Even more disquieting is his commentary on a combative presentation by a

consultant who responded aggressively to the task force's inquiries about the survey's design. Throgmorton wrote, "A more polished researcher could have obscured the central issue – the tropal (and perhaps loaded) nature of the survey questions – by...argu[ing] that his survey might have contained some unavoidable, but minor, distortion" (1993b:344). Wondering "whether the meeting would have gone differently if [the consultant] had chosen different rhetorical strategy," he concluded that the consultant had created an "character" for himself incompatible with the image the company was trying to portray: "Furthermore, his rhetoric reaffirmed the expectations of [the company's] opponents and thereby reconstituted the community and culture of conflict...A planner who understood planning to be persuasive argumentation about the future would have spoken differently" (1996:358). Whether or not this planner would have addressed the task force's questions or declined to include the survey's "loaded" language (that is, refused to participate in rhetorical manipulation) seems a purely performative set of choices, not normative. Throgmorton's planner as "skilled-voice-in-the-flow" dwells at the verbal surface of planning conflicts, pre-occupied by rhetorical performance and neglecting more fundamental principles of practice.

A far more compelling presentation of the role of rhetoric in planning comes from the analysis of a Norwegian highway-building controversy (Langmyhr 2000) – compelling in part because transportation is such a notoriously literal, synoptic, and conflictual corner of the field. Furthermore, the author issued an unusual challenge to transportation planners to accept "that persuasive and ethically sound use of rhetoric is...indispensable in the transport[ation] planners' repertoire of planning methods" (2000:683). While normative in

intent, Langmyhr laid out a set of "critical pragmatic" arguments for planners to take seriously the need for "persuasion competence" (2000:681): the increasingly complex institutional environment in which collaboration, negotiation, and policy justification are continual processes, as well as a recognition that rhetoric is "unavoidable, not inherently good (or bad), but...a prominent planning instrument...[for] framing the problems at hand, structuring impact analyses, and presenting the policy alternatives" (2000:681). Since he also emphasized the planner's obligation to "minimize distortion" in communication, Langmyhr accomplished the task Throgmorton did not: to establish a rationale as well as a normative framework for deploying rhetoric purposefully but not manipulatively or deceptively.

Noting that "the rhetoric of a political organization should be interpreted as an important part of the organizational 'production' " (2000:678), Langmyhr is pragmatic about how rhetoric operates in a political environment:

In the study of political and social phenomena the rhetorical point of view can...be understood in a very practical way: [i]t is a question of analyzing how verbal choices and practices create political reality, limit the range of possible solutions, and produce adherence to certain mental paradigms (Summa 1993:20, quoted in 2000: 672).

In the real-world environment of institutional politics, he argues, "[b]laming a planner for using rhetoric is like blaming a zebra for wearing stripes," adding, "Still, it seems appropriate to blame many transport[ation] planners (at all levels of the planning hierarchy) for not admitting [to] the rhetorical element of their work," clinging instead to the synoptic paradigm "to avoid value-laden conflicts or to ascribe such conflicts to 'politics' " (2000:679) – a particularly unrealistic wish given "developments in the institutional

framework of transport[ation] planning...characterized by a dwindling of the road authorities' dominant role" and corresponding changes in "comprehensive norms for citizen participation, environmental impact assessment and cooperation with a multitude of competing sectors" (2000:678).

Chiding planners in denial of their stripes, Langmyhr pointed out that the transportation planners already had a rhetorical strategy even if they might not have recognized it as such. Reviewing the road-building agency's "rhetorical approach" over the many years of debate and delay, he tracked strategies of adaptation to "changes in the transport[ation] planning institutions, their connections to the broader societal development, and the altered conception of transport[ation] planning problems" (2000:670) and examined "how planners...changed their arguments, including their reliance on analytic techniques, to sustain public acceptance of the...plan in a fluctuating planning context," citing examples that "represent building blocks of a rhetorical strategy aimed at coping with uncertainty. The building blocks...served to limit the range of possible problem framings, focus attention on selected impacts, and downplay highly uncertain elements of the recommended solution" (2000:673, 674). These "building blocks" included, for instance, "conveying an image of crisis" (2000:676), promoting arguments that the road improvement plan would have positive effects on the natural environment, and emphasizing modernization.

Invoking a "Habermasian notion of dialogue, in which parties meet to sort out the best arguments unhindered by power relations" as "a yardstick for handling conflicts in planning" (2000:680), Langmyhr's purpose remains close

to the critical side of communicative practice.<sup>234</sup> In a sense, he is continuing the process of institutional change not only by highlighting new "comprehensive norms" but also by recommending strategies that increase the potential for "non-distorted" communication: "There is continuity between dialogue and manipulation, and the major lesson for...practitioners is to acknowledge the possibilities of moving toward greater communicative rationality" (2000:681).<sup>235</sup> These applications of rhetorical principles seem less likely to be dedicated to a more polished presentation of obfuscation.

*Communicative Rationality:  
"Knowledge-in-Interaction"*

The premises of communicative rationality represent a radical shift in what constitutes information and how information is validated, as well as how it enters the decision-making process. In this context, narrative becomes a vital source of experiential data as well as a crucial component of the process of corroboration of scientifically-based data and learning by analogy. Moreover, these ongoing cycles of corroboration and collaboration are regarded as incubators of "innovative strategies that would not have emerged from bureaucratic or expert analysis" (Innes 1998:60). In communicative practice, information is dynamic and emergent. In fact, in the absence of a deliberative

---

<sup>234</sup> Innes summarized these principles as "assuring representation of all major points of view, equalizing information among group members, and creating conditions within the group so that the force of argument can be the deciding factor rather than an individual's power outside the group," together with the ability of "participants to assess the speaker's claims" according to criteria of sincerity, comprehensibility, legitimacy, and accuracy" (1995:187).

<sup>235</sup> Again, Langmyhr emphasizes the convergence of the pragmatic with the normative: "[D]ubious rhetoric may strike back at the authorities in democratic planning discourse...[A]rgumentative shortcuts may be persuasive in the short run, but prove harmful to the public and political acceptance in the long run. Major urban road projects often need years to mature, and consequently opponents will usually have several opportunities to bring a decision up on the agenda again. Another way of putting this is that communicative irrationality easily may spread to ruin means-ends rationality..." (681).

process within which information takes on meaning to all participants, data almost could be said not to exist. The routine production of tangible documents meeting legal and regulatory requirements – the whole bureaucratic apparatus developed in response to a previous generation of demands for open public sharing of all information – is no longer the sole legitimate measure of transparency and access to participation. In fact, rationality itself is re-located as an intersubjective process rather than a cerebral activity internal to any single individual:

Some focus on rationality in planning as a mental process of decision[-  
]making...I take rationality to be an interactive and argumentative process of marshaling evidence and giving reasons, a process that in principle minimizes excluding relevant information and encourages the testing of conjectures, a process that welcomes rather than punishes value inquiry... (Forester 1999:6).

To qualify as communicative rationality, this "interactive and argumentative process" must be organized along principles "assuring representation of all major points of view, equalizing information among group members, and creating conditions within the group so that the force of argument can be the deciding factor rather than an individual's power outside the group...The results of such a communicative process...will be rational to the degree that these commitments are met" (1995:187; see also 1998:60).<sup>236</sup>

---

<sup>236</sup> ... how barriers and distortions can be overcome in order to make democratic planning and decision-making possible. Forester and what he calls "the terribly misunderstood Habermasian notion of the 'ideal speech situation,' a counterfactual anticipation we make, Habermas argues, whenever we seek mutual understanding. Distorted communications, interactions shaped by existing power and ideology, are commonplace, hardly exceptions. This is precisely why Habermas seeks to clarify what communication free from domination, open communicative interaction, presupposes and requires – so that we may have a normative basis for evaluating the situation in which we now find ourselves...Habermas' appeal is not to some ideal communications community, but rather to the continual democratization of political discourse...He calls out attention to interaction and not argument because he wishes to stress that democratization is a matter of action and interaction, not only one of information and traditionally conceived rationality...Thus he calls for a continual exposure of unnecessary

This view of what might be called "knowledge-in-interaction" is descriptive as well as normative. Arguing that the technical/instrumental model of how planners and decision-makers identify, analyze, and use information "is simply not a good description of the reality of planning," Innes clarified how information is transferred and mobilized in ways other than the prior model would predict:

The new model does not dismiss calculation and objective, quantitative analysis as unimportant, nor experts as unnecessary; it does argue that formal information enters into public decisions in ways other than by decision-makers consciously employing the information as they weigh alternatives and make choices. Instead, the new model argues that in communicative planning, information becomes gradually embedded in the understandings of the actors in the community, through processes in which participants, including planners, collectively create meanings. These participants, moreover, rely on many types of "information," and not primarily on formal analytic reports or quantitative measures (Innes 1998:53).

According to Healey, the implications go beyond the data themselves: "This recognition generates a new terrain of planning method, which takes us...to the construction, contexts, meanings and ethics of communicative acts (1992:9) and gives rise to a new model for practice, in which "skilled planners work *across* knowledge forms rather than solely within the confines of rational-technical discourse" (1992:17, emphasis in the original).<sup>237</sup>

Empirical narrative has an active role in this model as a source of information, a way of testing information, and a source of practical guidance

---

distortions in communications, for the continual attention to unequal opportunities for political debate and argument, for continual criticism of prevailing beliefs and rationalizations" (1993:3, 56, 57).

<sup>237</sup> Other such "knowledge forms" include aesthetic-expressive and moral-practical (Healey 1992:9, 17, after Habermas 1984).



by analogy. In Innes' illustrative example from a consensus-based process to produce an estuary-management plan, experiential knowledge not only supplemented but informed the contributions of "scientifically[-]validated information" which became "only a small part of the information that participants used to argue, persuade, determine the nature of the problem, or decide what strategies might work" (1998:58):

A[n]... important kind of information was the participants' own experience...[and] came through the stories participants told. For example, fishermen told of how many bass they used to catch in the bay, and how they no longer could hook as many. Though the scientists at first dismissed such personal stories as "anecdotal" and unscientific, other participants responded to them as authentic indicators of problems and demanded that more up-to-date scientific studies be done. Indeed, the personal stories turned out to reveal some changes that science had not yet caught. Other stories were more like myths, stories about people in the past or about other problems, told to draw a lesson from the analogy (1998:58).<sup>238</sup>

Innes argues that the field must "revise the model of instrumentally[-]rational information use" because

[n]ot only does it neither predict nor explain what goes on in practice; it also provides few practical norms to guide the practitioner. Indeed, the twin assumptions that information is limited to scientific knowledge and that its value lies in its deliberate instrumental use have severely hampered understanding of what is going on in practice (Innes 1998:54).

Innes, Healey, and Forester all stress the key role narrative plays in re-establishing planning theory's footing. Citing a misfit between prescriptive theory based on decaying models of the planning process and current practice which already has departed from these models, the "communicative action

---

<sup>238</sup> Innes identifies experience and anecdote as two different kinds of information, but the distinction between them is not strictly delineated and is omitted here.

theorists find out what planning is by finding out what planners do, rather than by postulating what planning ought to be:"

...They pay attention to the messy part of planning that does not fit into a systematic framework. They build on the most fundamental of findings from the study of practice – that planning is, more than anything, an interactive, communicative activity. Systematic analysis and logical argumentation are but a tiny part of what this planner does. Communicative action theorists see planners as actors in the world rather than as observers or neutral experts...They rely on qualitative, interpretive inquiry than on logical deductive analysis, and they seek to understand the unique and the contextual, rather than make general propositions. These theorists tell stories and look for insights, rather than try to impose order and definition... (Innes 1995:184).

In a case study "based on observation of the communicative acts of a senior planner during a typical day," Healey explained the rationale of practice-based close observation and interpretive reflection:

The analysis of communicative acts focuses on the fine detail of planning work. Some analysts in the past have avoided this level of investigation on the grounds that it would emphasize talk and text, rather than the contextual conditions that constrain and structure the ideas, work, and contributions of a planner. It could render the researcher myopic to...power relationships... [However, s]tructure – the systems of authority (rules) and resource allocation[s] that give shape (distribute power) to social relations – is actively created by our daily conduct. We live interactively through communication. The study of communicative acts in planning work is thus as important as the study of resource flows and procedural systems (1992:10).<sup>239</sup>

In this spirit, Forester has made an exhaustive study of practice, "to analyze powerfully what insightful planners do well in the most challenging moments of their work," to extract theory "through the lived experience of

---

<sup>239</sup> Her research subject also "happened to be a highly reflective professional, conscious of at least some dimensions of his communicative acts. He also had clear ideas about the way a planner should relate to the diversity of clients in a municipal context" (1992:10).

planners and policy analysts, not as a substitute for those experiences" (1999:8). Advocating for "the value of thickly described practice stories," he detailed the "underappreciated aspects" of these stories (1999:8): the ways that they express and render political judgments, the ways that telling and listening not only require but promote "astute practical rationality" (1999:41). He urged planners to recognize the operational wisdom latent in the "extraordinary richness of ordinary stories" as they present the "practical and moral complexity of differing expectations, legal obligations, governmental commitments, historical precedent, and design suggestions" (1999:41). Forester also articulated another, more neglected dimension of narrative in a professional setting: that stories "convey the emotional demands of work in an ambiguous, politicized world as well as its messiness, detail, particularity, and uniqueness" (1999:40). In addition, although he is less specific about how to accomplish the full exchange of narrative data in a public forum, Forester also is willing to engage where Mandelbaum surrendered in the forum of asserted claims, engaging "the prior practical problem of learning about other claims-makers, those other citizens bringing claims that we can hardly understand if we do not understand those citizens' situatedness, their historical entanglements, their historically rooted aspirations, their interpretation of needs and senses of self" (1994:9-10).

In his efforts to transfer Habermasian abstraction into concrete planning environments, Forester lays out a thorough agenda for planners to achieve a shift in practice – and a shift in institutional self-definition – from the "strictly instrumental" to "practical-communicative:" from processing information to "shaping attention," from problem-solving to problem "reformulating," from "seeking detachment to [in order to] further

objectivity" to "seeking criticism to check bias and misrepresentation," from "treating participation as a source of obstruction" to "treating participation as an opportunity to improve analysis" (1993:28, Table 2.1). As aspirations, these tasks are clear; they are as much a stance as a methodology. However, in more resistant forums, where institutional interests in "non-distorted communication" and the equalization of power have not already been declared, the question of leverage arises, along with other more traditional political concerns: for example, in this widened embrace of participants, who legitimately represents a community? In addition, if everyone in the room agrees to a particular interpretation of quantitative and qualitative data, what guards against collective bias, and on what grounds could "institutionally-embedded information" then be challenged? A range of implementation dilemmas, perhaps deriving from a less roseate view of participatory processes, remains to be addressed.

#### *Critique of Communication-Centered Theory*

Despite their commitment to support the "emancipatory" work of planners "in the face of inequalities of power and political voice" (Forester 1999:2), the theorists of communicative practice indeed have come under fire for neglecting sharp analysis of institutional power and focusing on planners almost to exclusion of other participants. As Fainstein observed with some acidity, "Both the context in which planners work and the outcome of planning fade from view," while the primary theoretical and practical "concern has become subjective interpretation rather than identification of causes, constraints and substantive outcomes" (2000:455). Lauria (1995) also has critiqued communication-centered planning theory for focusing on "talk

and text" without integrating institutional analysis into its studies of rhetoric, discourse, and modes of storytelling – for relying too heavily on detailed examination of language alone and for ignoring how narratives both illustrate and enact relations of power. Fainstein concurred, arguing that the potential for any real change in power relationships is "dependent on accurate appraisal [of the political environment] and not just an examination of discourse" (2000:457).

Noting the tendency to "substitute moral exhortation for analysis," Fainstein also has taken issue with the righteous stance (and self-congratulatory tone) of the communicative-practice literature: "Like the technocrats whom they criticize, they appear to believe that planners have a special claim on disinterested morality..." (2000:455, 456). She is the most skeptical about what she sees as the evasion of political responsibility via the "procedural ethic" (2000:472) of consensus-building, while the structures to which theorists attribute the inequalities that communicative practice is supposed to address are left beyond the walls of the meeting room: "[C]hanging speech alone does not transform structures...[and] agreement by participants to a document does not necessarily mean that anything will happen" (2000:458, 460). This myopia and naïveté accounts for what she calls, most damningly, "the gap between rhetoric and action" (2000:460).

### *Gaps in the Planning Literature*

This review and brief critique of the recent planning literature reveals gaps where additional contributions about narrative analysis in planning practice would have utility.

- ◆ First, while Forester, Healey, and others have produced a series of detailed and compelling portraits of planners in action (and in reflection), those accounts have concentrated on how planners interpret and react, with general descriptions of other participants, often in a one-on-one setting or in summary form. An equally intensive and strategic focus on the narratives of other participants in the planning process and the institutional environment would broaden the reach of this "thick" examination of practice.
  
- ◆ Also, while a renewed emphasis on narrative and language has been accompanied by generalized instructions to listen critically and empathically, the field still needs criteria for analyzing the narratives that participants (and others) tell. Beyond creating a forum in which narratives can be told and given "diplomatic recognition" (Forester 1994), the generic call to attend to narrative currently is boundless, and a "bounded" guide or approach to narrative would enable practitioners to mine the vast lode of narrative data strategically rather than encyclopædically.
  
- ◆ In addition, a narrative strategy must respond to the context outside the walls of the meeting room as well as inside, with a sophisticated appraisal of the conflict's institutional environment from each of the perspectives around the table (and even beyond). Specific criteria established for the institutional analysis of narrative data would enable practitioners to move analytically between the subjective individual perceptions of participants, their analysis of the institutional surround, and the larger institutional structures themselves.

## BUILDING A PLANNER'S STRATEGY FOR NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

This section introduces strategies drawn from literary analysis to sharpen attention to narrative in a planning context. It reviews key terms and definitions related to narrative scenario-building as well as the figurative language known as "tropes" – all essential to the methodology proposed in Chapter V. While the language of narrative theory can be highly specialized, it should be re-emphasized that the skill to conduct narrative manipulation of form and content is not an esoteric talent, but a set of techniques ordinarily employed at varying levels of sophistication since toddlerhood. Moreover, this is not a fussy exercise in obscure rhetorical forms. The purpose of developing a vocabulary for narrative inquiry is here in service of an institutional rather than an æsthetic analysis. However, if these reminders attune a planner's ear to language and how it is employed in novel and vivid ways, an æsthetic pleasure may have been added to the demands of practice.

### *The Building Blocks of Narrative: Some Definitions*

Narrative structure and selectivity are important devices of narrative form, and they are examined carefully in the balance of this chapter for their sleight-of-hand tricks in the scenario-building process, together with rhetorical magic of trope and metaphor. "Trope" is a slippery term, referring both to figures of speech and modes of argumentation, and in both senses may accumulate surreptitiously over the course of several images, sentences, or passages before the reader becomes aware of their. For example, in the sentence above about narrative structure and selectivity, to refer to them as "devices" is to employ metaphor, since stories are constituted out of words, not machinery.

Presenting the two narrative elements as independently capable of "sleight-of-hand tricks" is then an additional exercise in personification, since language obviously has neither hands nor intentionality with which to conduct trickery. Moreover, to call tropes "magic" and "slippery," and then to warn the reader that they may accrue "surreptitiously," in combination with the earlier references to "devices" and "tricks" suggests that the author believes narrative conventions to be a series of attempts at fooling the reader. Based on the consistent imagery delivered by different figures of speech within this particular text, the reader of that sentence might detect the trope of conspiracy at work, even though the author had not been explicit about narrative conventions being acts of deception. It also is meant to define those rhetorical terms by using them – as has just been done in the preceding sentences of this paragraph.



**NARRATIVE SELECTION:  
THE SCENARIO-BUILDING PROCESS**

Narrative form is a compelling vehicle in the first instance because of its cargo: the pragmatic value of the content and of the *prima facie* representation of attitudes associated with that content. It is also a comfortable medium for the human apparatus of perception, conforming to the linear experience of time (or in time). It conveys a feeling-state. It accumulates meaning as it unfolds, reflecting new meanings back on prior incidents as the storyline proceeds. It seems natural, innocent, obvious, unremarkable. "Far from being a problem, then, narrative might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely, the problem of how to translate knowing into telling, the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning that are generally human rather than culture-specific" (White 1989:1).

But it has more treacherous dimensions. According to narrative theory, narrative form itself is a masterly trick: irrespective of content, narrative as a form implies a plot. No matter how creative (or how apparently uninflected) the content, it is the narrative form that first seduces the audience, as a logical construction that "unfold[s] storytime in real time" (Ricoeur 1986, in Cobb 1993:251) but establishes a philosophically arbitrary beginning, middle, and end (White 1989). In the realm of the empirical, this condition only worsens, because there is no genuine end to events, despite the human perception that events "seem to have ceased to happen when their meaning is shifted, and shifted by narrative means, from one physical or social space to another" (White 1978:23). Although the chronological array of some set of events may

be " 'translatable without fundamental damage,' in a way that a lyric poem or philosophical discourse is not," for them to acquire significance requires an invisible act of human intervention, in which "events must not be registered within the chronological framework of their original occurrence but narrated as well, that is to say, revealed as possessing a structure, an order of meaning, that they do not possess as mere sequence" (1989:5). Thus the audience constantly is engaged in two reciprocal and iterative processes:

The act of grasping a narrative...is a dual one: the interpreter has to grasp the narrative's configuring plot in order to make sense of its constituents [*i.e.*, its constituent elements], which he must relate to that plot. But the plot configuration itself must be extracted from the succession of events (Bruner 1990:43-4).

The habit of "emplotting" – of imposing a self-contained order, selective and thus inherently false, on a series of events – is so ingrained that it is ever-present and ordinarily invisible.<sup>240</sup> This streamlined chain of apparently relevant data points is the narrative backbone, the plotline. In order to assemble the plot, the narrator already has made multiple determinations about relevance: the relationship between the chosen data and the outcome

---

<sup>240</sup> E. M. Forster's witty and practical epigram on the construction of plot in a work of fiction captures the importance of this dimension in the reader's process of narrative construction: "A plot is...a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. 'The king died and then the queen died' is a story. 'The king died and then the queen died of grief' is a plot" (from *Aspects of the Novel*, quoted in Murray 2000:185). This comparison (on the distinction, at least in the first instance, between boring and engaging fiction) highlights the reader's impatience for causal explanation, moving from the vacuity of the unsatisfying first sequence, in which the king and queen pass expressionlessly from the scene, to the more satisfactory second sequence, when the brief phrase "of grief" implies an entire imagable (if stereotypical and melodramatic) series of events that begin to tap the reader's supply of "of-grief" images and associations. As the author of *A Passage to India*, Forster was exquisitely sensitive to the potential transformation of a given sequence of events by a set of cultural assumptions. He counted on the impulse of the reader to fill in by inference what the queen died of (and, for that matter, what the king died of as well) – as did his characters in *A Passage to India*, with tragic consequences. Forster had his own limitations in this regard; see Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, particularly pp. 200-06.

(or the prospective future outcome) of the story. Thus every narrative contains a proposition or set of propositions, overt or unacknowledged, about cause and effect. The establishment of causality – and from that, the inference of intentionality and motive – is the central narrative task, an inevitable cycling-through of narrative's purposeful nature.

The plot, as a deliberate sequencing of events, establishes motive as part of its interpretive footprint, as Cheryl Mattingly explained in her dissertation case study of narrative in a therapeutic setting:

Stories deal in motive...Stories need not provide complex psychological accounts of intentions but they do foreground intending, purposive agents in presenting how things have come about...To say that motivation plays a key role in defining an act is to say that *even where motions are the same, the acts will differ if intentions motivating them are different*...Because motive is so central to narration, following a story is an act of interpretation. The search for motives required to follow a story involves more than a simple assessment of individual intentions, for intentions, of course, are intelligible only within a situational and cultural context... (Mattingly 1989: 57, 62-4; italics added).<sup>241</sup>

Moreover, even when motions are the same, the acts will be *understood* differently if different parties construe different motivations for them. Cobb has maintained that motive and motivation are the burden of all conflict narratives and indeed all narratives:

Intention is central to the coherence of narratives because it provides a causal relationship between antecedent conditions and outcomes. Antecedent

---

<sup>241</sup> A famous example from Geertz: two boys winking, "in one,...an involuntary twitch; in the other, a conspiratorial signal to a friend," and then a third boy mocking the first two with a "fake-wink" and a fourth rehearsing his wink in a mirror "(7). The anthropologist's task is the difference between the "thin description" of a wink as a rapid eye contraction and a "thick description" of a wink as a gesture within "a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures in terms of which twitches, winks, fake-winks, parodies, rehearsals of parodies are produced, perceived, and interpreted..." (7).

conditions are events that are defined *in and by the narrative* as those that lead to or cause the outcome. When "outcomes" are social actions, antecedent conditions are always discussed in terms of the intentions...of the actors...Narratives *require* causal connections between events – otherwise there is no plot. From this perspective, intentions as discursive formulations [*i.e.*, as ways of using language to show intentionality] enable narrative structure (1994:172; italics in the original).

Political scientist Deborah Stone has articulated how the causal element is turned to strategic political purposes in terms similar to Cobb's. Stone points out that political battles are fundamentally "fights about responsibility," efforts "to control interpretations and images of difficulties" by "[u]sing causal theories, identifying causal agents, empowering 'fixers,' and generating alliances among those in same victim relationship to the causal agent" (1988:160-1). Political actors develop these causal stories to describe past, present, or future dangers and difficulties, to attribute them to actions of other individuals and organizations, assigning blame and agency, position and justification.

The establishment of causality and motive, however, turns on the interpretation of intentions: "where good will exists, people construct each other as well-meaning," and thereby allow re-framing of problematic events as accident or confusion "as beyond the control of the well-intentioned person" (Cobb 1994:167). Thus intentions may be distinguished from consequences – or, in the absence of "good will" (or social capital), intentions may be fused with those consequences, despite denials, justifications, or excuses to the contrary. Language will reflect this critique of intentions with a "discursive formula for responsibility" – in Cobb's example, the difference between "he hit her" and "it got broken" (1994:177).

Herein lies a danger, since "[t]o assume that the effects of an action are its purposes is to commit the *teleological fallacy*. Purpose must always be demonstrated with evidence of the actor's wishes or motives, apart from the effects of his or her actions" (Stone 1988:156; italics in the original). In the "rush to interpretation" (Coles 1989:14), it may be difficult to exert the self-discipline of Bruner's reminder that "there are no causes to be grasped with certainty where the act of creating meaning is concerned, only acts, expressions, and contexts to be interpreted" (1990:118).

---

### TENSIONS IN THE NARRATIVE PROCESS

<b>SEEKING CAUSAL LINKS</b>	<b>VS.</b>	<b>COMMITTING THE TELEOLOGICAL FALLACY</b>
<b>SEEKING COHERENCE &amp; CLOSURE</b>	<b>VS.</b>	<b>IGNORING CONTRADICTIONARY DATA</b>
<b>BUILDING A PROVISIONAL STORY</b>	<b>VS.</b>	<b>IGNORING THE MISFIT BETWEEN THE PROVISIONAL STORY AND NEW DATA</b>

---

**Fig. 4.1** – In the process of building scenarios out of accumulating data, there are constructivistic tensions between the impulse to combine the elements of narrative and the risk of over-interpreting the data or ignoring the misfits between the scenario in progress and new data.

More is at stake in the interpretive process, however, than the individual dramas of intentionality.

....Precisely because intentions locate persons in discourse via the positions established in narratives, intentions are central to the very political processes through which these positions are constructed and negotiated. Shotter (1984) has argued that the attribution and display of intentions in discourse positions

persons on the moral and relational "maps" used to navigate social life....The relational map refers to the web of relationships within which persons are enmeshed; the position of any one person on this map is reciprocally related to the position of others...Davies and Harre (1989) describe "positioning" as the very political interactive process by which persons (a) establish a moral order, that is, sets of responsibilities, obligations, and privileges; and (b) locate self and other within this moral order, that is, good guys vs. bad guys, innocent vs. guilty, cooperative vs. uncooperative, fair vs. unfair, and so forth. (1994:178)

The building of narrative scenarios reinforces or contradicts these "very political processes," constructing intentions, relationships, "sets of responsibilities, obligations, and privileges." It also creates opportunities for "positioning," or presenting dramatic material that sorts out "the good guys vs. the bad guys." These are very powerful, even seductive categories, and they align almost seamlessly with the conspiracy trope – compounding the teleological dangers and the risk of ignoring other complexifying data.

## TROPE & METAPHOR

To label the generalizable tendencies across planning narratives as "tropes" borrows a term common to the literature of narrative theory. In spite of its frequent appearance, however, a simple definition of trope can be maddeningly hard to pin down, and distinguishing trope from metaphor – the disputed object of an enormous and overlapping literature – can be a labyrinthine task. Literary theorists, linguists, and laborers in the cognitive sciences use both terms freely, with wide variations in the scale and scope of their respective reach and intent. For the ancients, "trope" carried a specific meaning: it referred to an elaborate taxonomy of figures of speech and rhetorical devices, from *anthimeria* to *zeugma*, of which metaphor was only one instance. Blurred in looser modern usage, however, today "[n]o...clear-cut terminology exists" either for trope itself or for the relationship between trope and metaphor.<sup>242</sup> For clarity's sake, this dissertation maintains the traditional hierarchy in which trope is the global term referring to the full library of figurative and rhetorical language, while metaphor is technically the narrower, if increasingly elastic, term.<sup>243</sup>

Critical to the understanding of trope is that it is cumulative, an aggregation of rhetorical figures in a given text that represent or carry a specific common implicit meaning; to identify the trope at work is to make explicit the

---

<sup>242</sup> <<http://www-ditl.unilim.fr/art/trope.htm>>

<sup>243</sup> While in current usage references to a "controlling metaphor" in a given text may cover a great deal of syntactical territory, here metaphor remains but one of the many rhetorical devices under the larger rhetorical umbrella. In the discussion below, some authors' observations on metaphor radiate upward, as it were, toward trope as a whole, and are meant to illuminate meaning-making across the entire broad range of rhetorical forms.

meaning at the center of those devices' attention.<sup>244</sup> A particularly clear example illustrating the operation of tropes comes from a book review that reflects on the representation of the disease Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). "The trope of ghosting appears throughout literature, theatre, journalism, and film about HIV/AIDS," the reviewer argued, then analyzing a contemporaneous novel in which

the narrator who is remembering her AIDS-afflicted friend discusses the paradox of the person-with-AIDS as a member of the "living dead." This narrator, Rita, says: "Even before David actually died, there was a fight over the body..." [and, later, that] "David's closest friends had accepted his death long ago. In fact, most had buried him emotionally while he was still registering a pulse..."<sup>245</sup>

According to this analysis, ghosting as a trope covers an array of images and rhetorical expressions that ultimately converge on one meaning: that people with AIDS, a wasting disease in which the physical person gradually disappears before his friends' eyes, also enter a newly marginal social and political status. Rather than saying directly that "David, a shadow of his

---

<sup>244</sup> For example: "the nineteenth-century trope of woman as flower and man as bee" or the "foreground[ing] of a previously obscured metaphor in [the] aptly titled *Secret Journeys: The Trope of Women's Travel in American Literature...*" (Catherine Golden, "Secret Journeys: The Trope of Women's Travels in American Literature" [review], *American Literature*, Vol. 71, No. 4, December 1999, pp. 823-4). Also: "*La perrugue* is a French idiomatic expression meaning work one does for oneself in the guise of work done for an employer, as when one photocopies personal material on the office account...In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau construes the idea as a socio-cultural trope..., in which the socially weak (e.g., those who must work for others) make use of the socially strong (e.g., the bosses) by carving out an independent domain within the circumstances imposed upon them from above"

<<http://www.thecore.nus.edu.sg/landow/post/poldiscourse/perruge.html>>.

<sup>245</sup> Diana Davidson's essay, "How many souls collide underwater? Enough': Reading Michelle Cliff's *Bodies of Water* as an Activist HIV/AIDS Narrative"

<<http://www.dur.ac.uk/~dng0zz5/davidson.htm>>. The novel under examination is *Rat Bohemia*, by Sarah Schulman (New York: Dutton, 1995). Davidson continues, "Another literary example of the trope of ghosting in talking about an AIDS-like illness is Henry Ibsen's late nineteenth-century play *Ghosts*, which ghosts the sexually[-]transmitted, and at that time often-fatal, disease of syphilis."



former physical self, also has become a marginalized person," however, the author's language and the language of the characters put David (and by implication, other AIDS victims) in the liminal state of the apparitional: David has become a member of the "living dead," who has been "buried...emotionally while he was still registering a pulse" while the living "fight over the body" not yet dead. To assert that AIDS victims cross the metaphorical threshold between life and death while they are still alive, the author compiled clues in the text through assorted figures of speech that aggregate as the trope of ghosting. By drawing out and naming the accumulation of images as that particular trope, the reviewer brings that assertion to the surface.<sup>246</sup>

The operation of both trope and metaphor lies at the center of an ongoing debate about the nature of language – a debate which only has been intensified by current research into the neurological mechanics of human cognition. Tropes raise a fundamental question: whether the figures of speech and other devices of classical rhetoric are essentially ornamental (words or phrases employed in "artful deviation" from ordinary meaning for rhetorical effect, a leading aesthetic indicator of "poeticity") or whether they serve as a building block of human cognition and expression – that is to say, whether language itself is tropological in nature. The contemporary correspondence between linguistics, philosophy, psychology, and neurology has led theorists in each field to identify trope as the fundamental process by which the mind assimilates experience into language – that is,

a process of rendering the unfamiliar...familiar; of removing it from the domain

---

<sup>246</sup>And perhaps to the reader's full attention, although a careful reader already may have noted it. The reader reserves the right, of course, to challenge the reviewer's claims.

of things felt to be "exotic" and unclassified into one or another domain of experience encoded adequately enough to be felt to be humanly useful, non[-] threatening, or simply known by association (White, 1978:5).

Without a systematic series of experiential analogies that map a knowable world, no linguistic communication would be possible. Yet there remains something almost magical in this associative process, in this "way of cognition in which the identifying qualities of one thing are transferred in an instantaneous, almost unconscious, flash of insight to some other thing that is, by remoteness or complexity, unknown to us...Metaphor is our means of effecting instantaneous fusion of two separated realms of experience into one illuminating, iconic, encapsulating image" (Nisbet 1969:4). Turner similarly emphasizes the constructivist leap: "Metaphor is, in fact, metamorphic, transformative" (1974:155).

*Schön's "Generative Metaphor:"  
The Uses of Enchantment*

The ongoing debate about the nature of figurative language has laid out a paradox: the contradictory but compelling claims that trope and metaphor make new experience comprehensible by analogy to the familiar, and that, conversely, they shock the reader into recognition (literally, "re-cognition," a new apprehension and understanding) through a process of unanchoring the familiar through new analogies. Within the fields of planning and policy-making, Donald Schön noted almost 40 years ago the important role of that metaphorical counterpoint in shaping the process of analysis and problem-solving with his insight into what he called "generative metaphor." [1965:254] Defining metaphor as "a particular kind of SEEING-AS, the...'carrying over' of frames or perspectives from one domain of experience to another," Schön

focused on how metaphor is used to frame a problem and the implications of that process of enchantment – of how we fall, as he put it, "[u]nder the spell of metaphor" and then formulate, while in that figuratively altered state, a response to the original problem (1965:255; capitalization in the original). He began by looking at "the 'stories' people tell about troublesome situations – stories in which they describe what is wrong and what needs fixing," and concluded that these stories are anchored on a controlling image for the problem at hand:

When we examine the problem-setting stories told by the analysts and practitioners of social policy, it becomes apparent that the framing of problems often depends upon metaphors underlying the stories which generate problem setting and set the direction of problem[-]solving (1965:255).

In crystallizing the understanding of the problem, Schön argued, metaphor generates the corresponding image of the solution: he offered the metaphorical example of "fragmented" social services, whose prospective solution ostensibly becomes apparent in the language depicting the problem – in this case as the figurative opposite of fragmentation, coordination.

One potential pitfall in the realm of public policy-making and planning is the pernicious possibility that such a generative metaphor might mask rather than reveal the workings of a problem. To explore Schön's own example: fragmentation is a condition that becomes problematic only when it is "seen as the shattering of a prior integration," thus presupposing that integration is the preferred state (1965:255). However, the metaphor leaves unstated the reasons or conditions behind disintegration, and therefore unavailable to analysis. Moreover, in the logic of opposites on which the definition of

generative metaphor depends, if the original condition had been characterized as too much centralization, then decentralization – or fragmentation – might have become instead the image of the good.

So in this process of enchantment lurks the potential danger of being entrapped by metaphor as "a species of liminal monster" (Turner 1974:31), an invisible form of possession in which figures of speech enter the working vocabulary of professional practice in such a routine way that planners forget that their daily vocabulary has metaphorical origins:

...[T]own planners, when talking about the way towns live and grow, invoke images drawn from nature when they consider town plans..., with excursions into pathology when pointing to crises. But the town is not really like a natural phenomenon. It is an artefact – an artefact of a curious kind, compounded of willed and random elements, imperfectly controlled. If it is related to physiology at all, it is more like a dream than anything else.<sup>247</sup>

It may be as critical to articulate what cities are *not* like, when language has become habitual. In his investigation of metaphor, Schön sought a linguistic cue to how planners (and others) analyze problems and conceptualize solutions. In a similar vein, this dissertation's exploration of trope seeks linguistic cues to how planners (and others) interpret data and build narratives, particularly in the midst of conflict. Recognizing patterns of interpretation and narrative construction also gives insight into the radically different stories told by multiple players and observers, and how these often contradictory tales can logically co-exist. Reflectiveness on the language in and the organization of planning narratives serves in part as an antidote to

---

<sup>247</sup> J. Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), preface (note: variant spelling of "artifact" in the original).

metaphorical enchantment, so that the power of rhetorical devices to persuade and of cultural norms to obscure does not overwhelm or slip by the critical faculties of unwary planners (as well as other participants and witnesses).

### *The Sense of an Ending*

One of the most mysterious and sly features of narrative is its capacity to come to an apparent and persuasive end. Historical narrative "summons us from afar...and displays to us a formal coherency to which we ourselves aspire," through a process of "recapitulation that casts light back over meanings originally recorded in order to redistribute the force of a meaning that as immanent in all of the events from the beginning" (White 1978:21, 20). Thus the meaning of a case history, an anecdote, a newspaper story on a planning controversy depends, in part, on the artifice of an ending that seems linked by prior design to not only the origin of the immediate case, object lesson, or conflict but also to preceding histories.

For planners, narrative theory provides an analytic reminder of the construction of meaning at each point in the process. If planning narratives are a special case of historiography, a kind of fiction that recognizes certain shared facts but struggles, in literary theorist Hayden White's phrase, with other claims of verification, then the tools of literary analysis can be applied to the raw materials of planning processes. If stories are a common building material, unexotic and inescapable in practice, then the tools of the narrative trade offer planners a practical way to gather, analyze, and manage stories – a way that respects the potentially irreconcilable differences among them and

yet mobilizes them for action. Planners thereby join poets in the epistemological landscape where they "can present for inspection...an imaginary garden with real frogs in it' " – and with real consequences.<sup>248</sup>

---

<sup>248</sup> Marianne Moore, "Poetry," 1921.



# V. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

## *Introduction:*

### *Using the Tools of the Narrative Trade*

For literary theory to serve a practical purpose in a planning context, it must be a handy tool. Indeed, using the tools of the narrative trade requires no special apparatus other than the critical regard of information that is likely to be already available. It does demand a kind of focused attention, because narrators operate by stealth, assembling the building blocks of narrative as seamlessly as possible to solicit the audience's credulity and sympathy for a particular "theory of responsibility." As outlined in the previous chapter, while the audience focuses on the content, the narrator is manipulating form. In this shell game, the narrator has an advantage: what Bruner called the "structural kinship or...affinity between 'fictional' and 'empirical' narratives" and their formal "indifference" to the distinction, noting that a narrative "can be 'real' or 'imaginary' without the loss of its power as a story" (Bruner 1990:52, 44). Conversely, understanding how a narrative is built permits its reverse engineering. Knowing that the techniques of a novelist are structurally identical to those of not only the historian and the journalist but also the citizen and the planner allows narratives encountered in the public domain to be analyzed for their implicit arguments and assumptions.

The goal of this theory-building exercise is to enable those techniques of narrative analysis to become operationally and not just theoretically useful to planners. This dissertation's hypothesis is that planners are surrounded by



empirical narratives in the course of their work, that they as well as other participants (and observers) in the planning process are engaged in both constructing and analyzing these narratives as part of their professional practice, and that much of that interpretive activity occurs at a level below methodical attention. This hypothetical model of narrative assembly is constructivistic, rational, cyclical, and iterative, building on prior experience and analysis as an ongoing effort to make sense of disparate data and forge a provisional scenario that is plausible in (and about) the surrounding institutional environment. These scenarios tend to be self-reinforcing, until the confrontation between the provisional scenario and some new or newly-interpreted information raises questions that can be neither answered by the provisional scenario nor ignored: a crisis Mattingly describes as "an experience in the hermeneutic sense Gadamer and Heidegger reserve for moments when our anticipations and prejudgments are thrown into radical doubt" (1989: ).

#### *Narrative Analysis for Planners: A Method*

This dissertation identifies critical elements in a strategy of narrative analysis: a methodology for examining variant strands of narrative encountered in zones of conflict and for using narrative details to inspect participants' institutional analyses of the precipitating crisis and its proposed resolution. This approach to institutional analysis through narrative rests on the assumption that to do their work, planners enter a political space already shaped by the collective narratives of the participants, each of whom is engaged in an iterative process of building and revising a historical narrative which in turn frames that narrator's understanding of current events and

response to new information. Each of these narratives establishes a selective sequence of institutional moves and counter-moves from the conflict's origin through the present unfolding of events. The differences among these plot-lines are one source of narrative data, their dissimilarities allowing comparative analysis of content and emphasis, their contrasts providing clues to alternate "theories of responsibility" about contested action. Therefore the proposed method for narrative interpretation is characterized first by attention and reflection: holding contradictory plot-lines in suspension, as important comparative data, and conducting a "factor analysis" to articulate that narrator's institutional analysis.

The proposed interpretative method then directs attention to narrators' figurative language for another series of interpretive cues found in the linguistic patterns collectively known as tropes. In literary analysis, consistent imagery conveyed through the use of tropes indicates an underlying theme. Such themes themselves are powerful indicators of key issues present in the text but which may not have been communicated more explicitly or directly. What this dissertation adds to the theoretical literature about narrative analysis in the context of planning practice is the argument that a persistent pattern lies in the figurative language participants use as they craft their respective narratives. For each narrator, this pattern is manifest in three specific tropes reflecting the institutional dimensions of the conflict at hand:

- ◆ the trope of conspiracy (causality and intent),
- ◆ the trope of exile (status and voice), and
- ◆ the trope of resistance (authority and legitimacy).

For participants, the tropes mark the cycle of their ongoing efforts to discover and assess intent in the institutional environment, to gauge relative institutional status and the possibility of meaningful participation, and to justify responsive action either in deference to or in defiance of an institutional norm. For the planner, these tropes serve as heuristic devices for institutional analysis embedded in the language of participants' narration. The hypothesis also suggests that since practitioners are equally susceptible to narrative selection and rhetorical manipulation, reflecting on their own processes of narrative assembly and interpretation can "help planners be conscious of their prejudices and manage their responsibilities" (Ferraro in Mandelbaum *et al.* 1996:321).

"COURTHOUSE GRAFFITI FOR TWO VOICES:"  
COMPARISON OF NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

Jimmy C.  
Greatest Car Thief Alive  
Chelsea '88

Then what  
are you doing  
here?

– by Martín Espada,  
"Courthouse Graffiti for Two Voices,"  
from *City of Coughing and Dead Radiators* (1993)

Comparative narrative analysis begins with collecting multiple versions of the same tale and checking them against each other: characters, plot, dialogue, timelines, action. That process might not be as simple as it sounds. In the epigraph above, for instance, are two implied storylines, tagged as "courthouse graffiti" in the poem's title, presented as a contrasting set of compressed narratives, whose humor derives from the bombastic Jimmy C. still trying pass himself off as a talented car thief when limits of his talents obviously have landed him in Chelsea District Court.

Epistemology aside, the invasion of multiple perspectives introduces an interpretive warp, even among allies, as Forester's accounts of planners' debriefing sessions (1999) demonstrates clearly (although it also offers the opportunities, as he notes, for testing information, checking for misinterpretation, and adjusting analysis). Timeworn but hardy, the 1950 film *Rashomon* by Akira Kurosawa still presents the classic example of the complexities of the same circumstances recounted contradictory and

adversarial ways: the tale of an encounter and robbery with one hidden witness, told (and visualized) with four radically different plots, each colored by the four narrators' respective efforts to evade responsibility – perhaps the woman has been raped in the woods by a bandit, or perhaps not; perhaps she stabbed her husband with his own dagger, or perhaps, a samurai, he killed himself in disgrace. The two surviving participants and sole witness are brought to the police to explain what happened, and a medium is called in to transmit the testimony of the dead husband; they speak into the camera, each in turn, putting the audience in the figurative position of judgment, faced with the dilemma of perspective. The blatant contradictions between the stories told by the various participants – characterizing themselves variously as victims of circumstance or innocent bystanders – makes the self-regard in each impossible to deny, and even humorous, despite the ugliness of the encounters. But the last directorial trick on the viewer is that the witness – whose version has gained plausibility by making all three participants look weak, scared, self-promoting, and foolish to some degree – has his own secret: he has stolen the valuable dagger from the scene, undercutting his reliability as a disinterested party and narrator; no one is innocent, no one is trustworthy.<sup>249</sup>

---

<sup>249</sup> However, Kurosawa leaves the audience with this image: the shame-faced witness is caught in his lie at the temple where he has taken refuge in a storm and told his tale, but in the end he takes home a newborn infant left crying there in a basket on the steps. A poor man with children of his own, he cannot turn his back on an abandoned child. Some human capacity for generosity exceeds even self-interest. A different set of insights about narrative scenario-building are called out in the 2001 movie *Memento*, in which a man who has lost his capacity for short-term memory goes in search of his wife's killer. The director puts the audience in the position of the main character by presenting the story in reverse order – so that it too has no benefit of memory. The world without narrative continuity and orientation is a terrifyingly de-contextualized place: a place where, among other things, the main character can be manipulated into killing other people without remembering.

How, then, to approach the potential inconsistency, contradiction, or subterfuge in the multiple versions of an emergent political and substantive conflict? This chapter proposes a two-fold method: systematic attention first to each narrator's reconstruction of the story itself and then to each narrator's institutional analysis. Returning to the conditions for narrative identified by Bruner (1990:77) provides a guide to this narrative reconstruction process, to help build a template of empirical questions. Since he argues that these components are the fundamental cognitive units to which children must have cognitive access in order to participate in narrative, they also should provide a reliable baseline for narrative analysis:

- ◆ linearity – verification of events and chronological order in real time;
- ◆ agentivity – identification of "action directed toward goals controlled by agents";
- ◆ voice – a narrator's perspective on self and other; and
- ◆ canonicity – an understanding of what authoritative norm is being reinforced or challenged.

From the answers to the questions from this template, a comprehensive picture emerges from that narrator's perspective at whatever level of detail pursued in follow-up questions. Causal factors constituting each narrator's "theory of responsibility" may be volunteered spontaneously, elicited by follow-up questions, or by further careful attention to the narrator's figurative language – the tropes that will be presented in the next section, after institutional analysis below.

A simple heuristic device for mapping institutional analysis can be derived

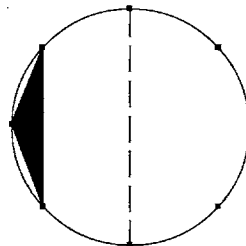
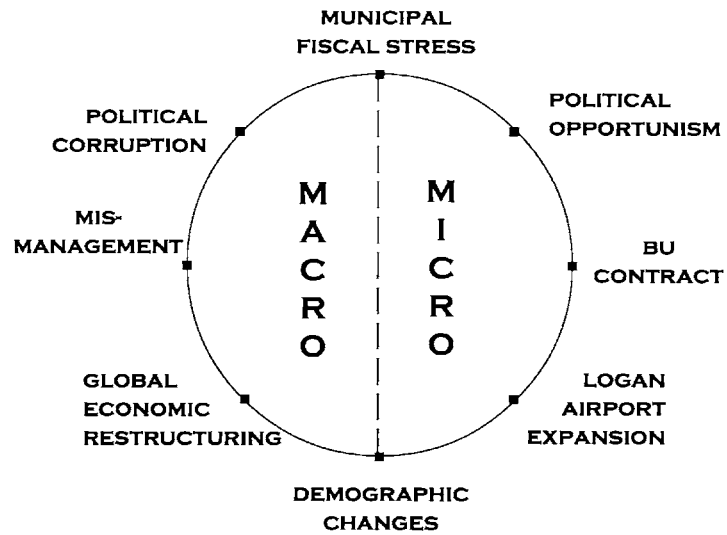
from the primary causal factors each narrator identifies. The "pool of causal factors" diagrammed in Fig. 2.1 in Chapter II becomes a base for further analysis (see Fig. 5.1). If, for example, a narrator asserts that corruption, mismanagement, and global economic restructuring were the major causal factors for Chelsea's demise and state takeover, those can be plotted on the circle and compared with another narrator's hypothesis that demographic change, municipal fiscal stress (perhaps related to declines in tax revenues from Proposition 2 1/2), and political opportunism (highlighting, for instance, the governor's unfinished prosecutorial business) are to blame. A more subtle and complete analysis might include more than three – or all – of the causal factors, but as a basis for comparison on major factors contributing to alternate "theories of responsibility," this heuristic device creates a graphic representation in which the overlaps and differences between narrators' hypotheses can be seen quite starkly.

The vertical labels on Fig. 5.1 indicate that the "pool of causal factors" was not organized in an entirely random way, but rather split into "macro" and "micro" domains: the structural or systemic factors as opposed to the local and idiosyncratic factors. Thus on the left half of the circle lie the more systemic factors of corruption, mismanagement, and global economic restructuring. The designation certainly is open to debate: for example, both corruption and mismanagement were highly personal activities in Chelsea City Hall. However, if mismanagement is regarded as the more general problem of delayed modernization of government operations, and if corruption is seen as a deeply embedded system tied into organizing crime in Greater Boston, then both factors may rise to the more structural level. On the other side of the circle, by contrast, are individual institutions – Boston

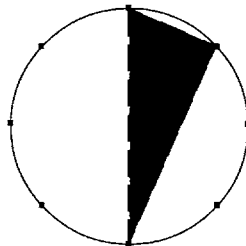
University and Logan International Airport (and its parent agency, Massport) – which were identified as major players and possibly catalysts for state takeover. Again, these "maps" are an indicator of patterns and distinctions which may be of strategic interpretive interest, vivid guides to the very different ways narrators and constituencies construct the institutional causes, intentions, and motives that were the engine of Chelsea's fall into receivership.



## CAUSAL FACTORS: MACRO & MICRO



**ALL MACRO FACTORS IDENTIFIED**



**TIPPING TOWARD MICRO FACTORS**

**Fig. 5.1** – Split into “macro” and “micro” domains, the more structural or systematic factors (in this case, corruption, mismanagement, and global economic restructuring) map to the left hemisphere of the circle, while the more local and idiosyncratic factors (demographic change, municipal fiscal stress, and political opportunism) map to the right hemisphere.



## THE THREE TROPES: AN INTRODUCTION

Participants in (and observers of) planning processes are of necessity pre-occupied with the distribution, exercise, and effect of political power; they also are engaged in institutional analysis of what enforces that power. The tropes identified here correspond to those aspects of power relationships: the concerted and motivated use of power, degrees of alienation from power, and the consequent answer to power. Conspiracy surmises both intentional acts of power and hidden links to power, detecting cause, intention, and motive; exile identifies niches in the ecology of power and displacement from those niches by some more forceful power; resistance prompts and justifies an active posture against countervailing power. Thus the tropes track an ever-evolving provisional answer to the eternal underlying question, "who rules?" and, in the multiple narratives of a planning conflict, to the additional normative question, "who should rule?"

Roughly rather than rigidly sequential, and of a cyclical rather than a linear nature, these three tropes form a constructivistic cycle that connects what is already understood to what is made of new information and analysis.

Meanwhile, the historic backdrop itself is not static, but revised over time by the infill of new information and the shading of historical significance, while ideas, proposals, and political action are filtered, as they occur, through these pre-existing narratives and through the tropes, whose operation affect decision-making and position-taking – thus continually renewing the ongoing cycle of reciprocity between stories and action.

Bruner's four narrative requirements again become useful. Their overlap with the activity of the tropes offers affirmation from the domain of psychological inquiry to the immediate domain of this inquiry into narrative. These correspondences between Bruner's terms and the three tropes are striking: between conspiracy and combined qualities of "linearized agentivity"; between exile and conditions of voice; and between resistance and "canonical recognition" (or the defiance of that canon, honored in the breach rather than the observance). These affinities suggest that the tropes address the most fundamental narrative concerns, and thus might well serve as a guide to where narrative selectivity has had its impact in a particular construing of events.

---

### CORRESPONDENCES

BRUNER'S REQUIREMENTS OF NARRATIVE	DIMENSIONS OF EXPERIENCE	TROPE
"Linearized agentivity"	Causality & intent	Conspiracy
"A narrator's perspective"	Status & voice	Exile
"Canonical recognition"	Authority & defiance	Resistance

**Fig. 5.2** – Conditions for narrative are linked to the tropes through the dimensions of experience they address.

---

As noted in Chapter I, the three tropes are presented in somewhat stark and dramatic terms which some readers might prefer to see described in more neutral language or language that aspires more directly toward optimism about conflict resolution. Why, if transparency, inclusion, and collaboration

are the aspirations of a participatory planning process, identify the tropes by such hyper-vigilant characterizations? The second set of terms, however, are no more neutral than the original tropes; they may offer more comfort, perhaps even more inspiration, but they are as normative and deeply shaded as their antonyms. Moreover, the discomfort is intentional, meant to generate a *frisson* appropriate to the problematic environment of public conflict. The three tropes as hypothesized embrace a broad possible spectrum of responses, with gradations from "light" to "moderate" to "severe," but they are present; where they are individually or collectively absent in favor of transparency, inclusion, and/or collaboration, so also is the conflict that makes them analytically useful.

It also is important to emphasize here that while the tropes are isolated from each other for analytic purposes and diagrammed schematically in a linear fashion in Fig. 5.3a for clarity, they interact in many different combinations, rather than in single file. For each of the identified constituencies in Fig. 5.3b, the diagram indicates that as data arrives, from whatever source, it is refracted through each trope at the specific "angle" of that constituency, circulating through the cycle to Institutional Analysis.



## SCHEMATIC DIAGRAM: ONE INTERPRETIVE CYCLE THROUGH THE TROPES

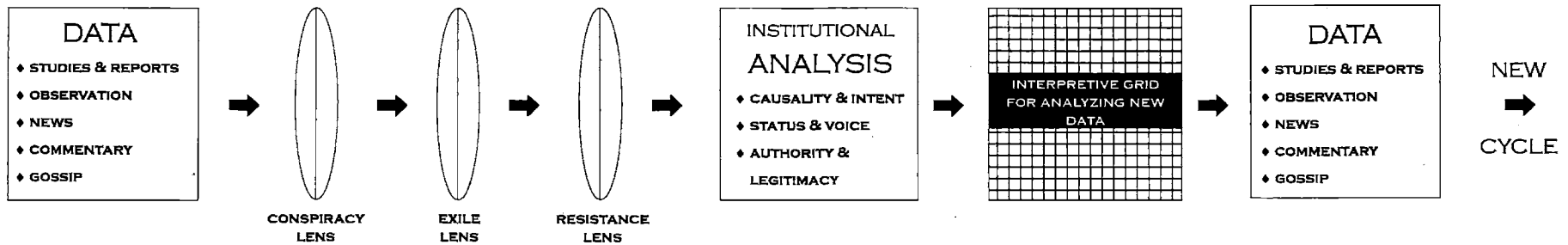


Fig. 5.3a – One interpretive cycle through the tropes, as information enters from various sources; filters through the lenses of conspiracy, exile, and resistance in particular ways for each constituency; and is integrated into an institutional analysis which becomes the interpretive grid for new data, as the cycle begins anew..

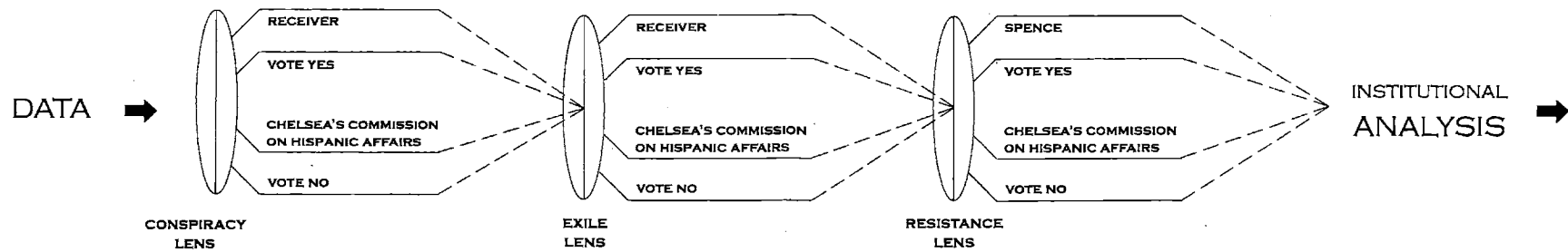


Fig. 5.3b – For each of the identified constituencies, as data arrives, it is refracted through each trope at the specific "angle" of that constituency, circulating through the cycle to institutional analysis.

FIG. 5.3





*Conspiracy:  
Causality & Intent*

The prosecutor spoke "conspiracy"  
as if Demetria were a mercenary  
trading in helicopter gunships,  
not the poet with a reporter's notebook.  
The prosecutor spoke "smuggling"  
as if two pregnant refugees  
were bundles of heroin,  
not fleeing a war of slit bellies.  
The prosecutor spoke "illegal aliens"  
as if El Salvador were a planet  
of brown creatures with antennae,  
not mestiza women dividing in birth.  
The prosecutor spoke of conspiracy  
to smuggle illegal aliens,  
indicting the poet with a poem,  
her poem for two women of El Salvador,  
traveling with them by way of Juarez,  
evidence abducted from her desk....

– by Martin Espada

"Sing in the Voice of a God Even Atheists Can Hear"<sup>250</sup>

Against the examination in Chapter IV of narrative structure, where causality already is said to be embedded in the construction of plot-lines, it may seem redundant to articulate the trope of conspiracy as a separate linguistic presence or activity. Plot and trope are, nonetheless, distinct. In planning narratives (as a species of historiographic narratives), the suspicion, establishment, discovery, or revelation of intent and motive is integral and ever-present not only in the story's structure but in the language itself – accentuating the conventions of plot, perhaps, but identifiably separate and emphatic. The plot, as narrated, orders action through a logical sequence

---

<sup>250</sup> *Imagine the Angels of Bread* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), pp. 87-89.

while, at the same time, the trope of conspiracy is expressed through various figures of speech further illuminating what the narrator believes to be the intentionality of that logic. Take, for an example, the aphorism "circumstantial evidence is a trout in the milk:" that is, if there is enough water in the milk for a fish to survive, then the logical (if unverified) conclusion would be that someone has tampered with the milk – that it has been watered down, by an as-yet unidentified party, presumably to sell more product to unsuspecting customers. A sentence that at first glance appears to be surreal nonsense becomes a narrative complete with a "theory of responsibility"; the literal "trout in the milk" becomes not only evidence of but also a metaphor for calculated deception – in this case, just one figure of speech from which the trope of conspiracy could be said to arise.<sup>251</sup>

As an exercise in logical reasoning and as an umbrella-term with many different nuances, "conspiracy" is used to encompass the full range of pre-meditated action characterized across a broad spectrum of intent. Fundamentally, however, conspiracy proposes a direct but concealed relationship between human agents (and their political, social, and economic institutions) to account for cause and effect in a given set of circumstances. In the pattern on the fabric of social capital, it may read as collaboration in the positive sense, driven by compatibility and cooperation; but on the flip side of that same fabric, it can be construed as collaboration in the negative sense – collusion, co-optation, and corruption.

---

<sup>251</sup> Acknowledgement to Dorothy Parker for her memorable treatment of La Rochefoucauld's aphorism, and to my mother for reading Parker's acid-comic essay "The Little Hours" (1939) to me one night in the late 1960s when I couldn't sleep, thereby introducing me to both milk-fed trout and irony.

---

## SHADES OF CONSPIRACY

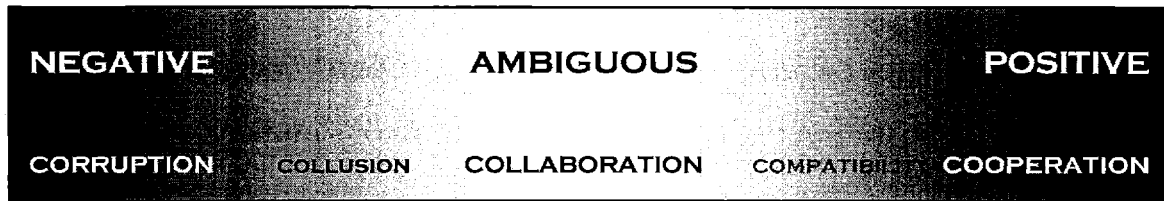


Fig. 5.4 – "Collaboration" squints towards cooperation on the one hand and towards corruption on the other.

---

Clearly, conspiracy is a word that comes with a reputation, not all of it positive. It has a film-noir cast to it, the sense of manipulation by unseen forces putting the protagonist at a disadvantage, even in danger. It also can be applied with a dash of mockery, the somewhat redundant phrase "conspiracy theory" implying a lack of credibility, a super-rationality that over-interprets details and derives connections out of circumstantial evidence – the realm, in Geertz's words, of "paranoids and swindlers" (1973:17-8). Reality, he pointed out, is more crumbly, and a story's coherence may be the tip-off that the logical chain is too clean. Nonetheless, the underpinning of the conspiracy trope is the quest for information, hidden, withheld, or of unappreciated significance,. That assessment is made in the eye of the beholder, and revealed in the language of the narrator.

Whenever chronology becomes causality, or wherever nests of relationships and interests appear, in narrative alignment, to explain coincidence or convergence as systematic coordination, a plot – in the narrative sense – is at work. When a narrator chooses language to portray those coincidences and convergences in the overlap between personal and institutional networks,

the conspiracy trope is at work – and the character of that portrayal will be evident in the language and figures of speech the narrator employs. Whether the circumstances are portrayed accurately – that is, whether there is a trout in the milk, how it got there, and if there indeed is enough water for it to survive – is a separate set of questions for the narrator's audience to pursue.

If the inverse of conspiracy is transparency, then another way to look at the material framed by the conspiracy trope is as the product of opacity. Recognizing the impact of absent as well as present data – the gaps and silences, the information missing or withheld in the narrative string – is critically important. The evolutionary process of narrative-building emphasizes the power of information and its channels of distribution, and the narrative implications of new data previously withheld or otherwise inaccessible. The impact of new information is twofold. The discovery of new data will influence interpretation and synthesis not only because additional information alters the content of the narrative but also because the storyline itself adapts to include the prior act of withholding, postulating a reason for the cycle of secrecy or inaccessibility. Whether the prior exclusion from information is seen to have been enforced by an individual or an institution (or some combination thereof) becomes part of the narrative itself, as does the sudden access to information and how it was accomplished: whether, for example, through back-channel relationships, through public demands, through "leaks" to the news media or reportorial investigation. These multiple alternatives shape the resulting narratives quite differently: as tales of loyalty, insurgency, manipulation, or revelation.

Secrecy is an important quality to highlight because of the inferential nature

of narrative construction and reconstruction. Sissela Bok has examined the impact of secrecy and revelation across a broad range of human encounters, and is particularly sensitized to how differential access to information contributes to the perceived placement of insiders and outsiders as not only an analytic and political but also a social and emotional experience. She identified the powerful desires that are fed and satisfied by access to information (or disappointed by lack of access): the feeling of self-aggrandizement, even grandiosity, that comes from being identified with power, with insider status, with being "in the loop," as contrasted with the associated frustration and humiliation of its opposite, "out of the loop:"

The separation between insider and outsider is inherent in secrecy, and to think something secret is already to envisage potential conflict between what insiders conceal and outsiders want to inspect or lay bare...[Among the] powerful motives behind the attraction of secrets are the desire to gain control, to feel superior to those not in possession of the secrets, and the longing for the sheer enjoyment and intimacy that learning secrets can bring. These motives nourish the desire to be an insider rather than an outsider to the secret, to be accepted as an intimate or an initiate, and to cross forbidden boundaries (1982:6, 34).

By highlighting secrecy as a socially- and emotionally-loaded phenomenon, Bok helped distinguish between the puzzle itself (the object of conspiracy) and the drama of the process of secrecy and revelation. She understood anew the bromide that information is power: information as power that lies not only in the data itself, but also in the knowledge (or suspicion) that some constituencies have access to data and some do not – a differential that stands as a proxy for political position. Bok at times may overdramatize the personal drama of secrecy, but she underscores the potential seductiveness of the information game and throws an important dimension into high relief: that

in the context of a public process that has been presented as participatory, anything that seems to militate against full or equitable participation, including the possession and exchange of information, becomes potential evidence to some participant or observer of conspiratorial discrimination against some party. Information has currency value beyond its actual content in a political economy, and its distribution process is folded into the narrative, another exhibit in the body of evidence, circumstantial and otherwise.

Conspiracy, then, is an analytic category accompanied by other complex emotional and moral responses. As Stone noted, "causal stories can be emotionally compelling; they are stories of innocence and guilt, victims and oppressors, suffering and evil" (1998:165). In the public domain, the causal chains present or hypothesize compelling sequences of incremental choices and consequences. The trope of conspiracy sets up the classic dualities of the powerless and the powerful, insiders and outsiders, agents and victims, them and us. Non-specific references to "the system," for example, or blaming a generalized and unidentified "they" for some specific action represent the reflexive assignment of power to some linked set of actors with real or perceived control, at the top of a political and economic hierarchy, whether formal or informal. And yet players in different institutional settings, or in different positions in the same institutional environment may hold wholly divergent assessments of who is assigned which role in those dualities, and who has the advantage in the game.

In the Chelsea case, the prevailing notion held equally strongly by the warring camps was that the receiver's chief of staff was drafting the charter with the

consultants behind closed doors in City Hall in a parallel, secretive process, reducing the Charter Preparation Team's deliberations to the ritualistic performance of a script whose the outcome already had been determined – a set piece in which decisions were meant to be ratified rather than openly debated, challenged, or transformed. From the perspective of Chelsea's Commission on Hispanic Affairs, this off-stage activity was tantamount to forestalling the Latino community's future entry-level access to the political system, and intentionally so. From the point of view of the Vote No constituency, the manipulation of the charter-drafting process was meant to block the return of their preferred mayoral candidate back into Chelsea politics and to hand the levers of government to the new elite: those connected to the receiver's office, who also were privileging or at least pandering to the new immigrants – a paradoxical conclusion, given the Hispanic Commission's conclusions from the same evidence. In these mirror-image scenarios, the perception of secrecy and differential access to information – at variance with the rhetoric of participation – was a key factor in how diametrically-opposed groups came to see each other gaining differential benefits, entirely at odds with their opponents' assessments.

These suspicions are particularly sensitive, even potentially fatal to any hope of consensus, in the context of a participatory process, since the nominal goal – and certainly the rhetorical goal – of community participation is to create a forum of peers in a decision-making process and thereby to counterbalance any perceived tilt toward "insiders" or constituencies with special access.

Those who see themselves at a disadvantage in the process become or are able to cast themselves as outsiders, excluded or blocked from power – a natural linkage or feedback loop with the next trope, the trope of exile.

*Exile:*  
*Status & Voice*

The refugee's run  
across the desert borderlands  
carved wings of fright  
into his forehead,  
growing more crooked  
with every eviction notice  
in this waterfront city of the north.

He sat in the office for the poor,  
daughter burrowed asleep  
on one shoulder,  
and spoke to the lawyer  
with a voice trained obedient  
in the darkness of church confessionals  
and police barracks, Guatemalan dusk.

The lawyer nodded through papers,  
glancing up only when the girl awoke  
to spout white vomit on the floor  
and her father's shirt.  
"Mi vida:" my life, he said,  
then said again, as he bundled her  
to the toilet.

This was how the lawyer,  
who, like the fortune-teller,  
had a bookshelf of prophecy  
but a cabinet empty of cures,  
found himself  
kneeling on the floor  
with a paper towel.

– by Martín Espada,  
"Mi Vida: Wings of Fright,"  
from *City of Coughing and Dead Radiators* (1993)

If narrative only represented the order of relevant events in time, then it



could take the form of a simple timeline, a monochromatic list: "this happened, and then that happened," a chronological stream susceptible to a linear (and iterative) analysis of content and portent, of cause and effect. But narratives have other vital functions and are repositories for other kinds of data and interpretation. As Mattingly observed, "Stories are about the 'feltness' of life; they are about events as experienced" (1989:6). Moreover, they are absorbed with the question of whose experience of those events is represented and ratified, and whose is misrepresented, challenged, or unrepresented – what literary and cultural critic Edward Said has called "permission to narrate" (1995:65) the circumstances at hand. Permission implies authority, a set of vertical relationships in which the narrator assigns status, implicitly or explicitly, and through which the narrator's voice (and that of assorted relevant players, by comparison) can be amplified or denied. It is in the context of this authority that resistance emerges, a process the subsequent section of this chapter will examine. But the trope of exile functions as an important way-station between conspiracy as the inference of power and resistance as the counter-response to that inferred power: exile expresses relationship – whether central or peripheral, welcome or unwelcome, effectual or ineffectual – to that power source.

As component elements of the trope of exile, status and voice are simultaneously personal and political terms. Each is experienced individually but hardly in a vacuum: deriving from historical encounters with power in its various forms, they are weighed and measured in a social context, constantly, comparatively, and cumulatively. They are, however, separate calculations: the perception of relative status is made with reference to some external structural backdrop of vertical and horizontal relationships, while

the assessment of voice requires not only a judgment about efficacy but a estimation of the risk involved in exercising that voice. This assessment is central to how the story is told as an episode in the democratic struggle over whose voice is to be heard and will be effective in the crafting of that conflict's resolution (or in re-casting the terms of the problem altogether). Where the conspiracy trope tracks apparent systematic coordination within networks, the exile trope conveys the results of a different test: a test of enfranchisement or disenfranchisement from those networks. It marks the narrator's assessment of who has the ability to interrupt or to insert new interests into that systematic coordination, and the extent of meaningful access to productive institutional relationships that could alter the outcome of a given dispute or condition.

Like conspiracy, exile is a highly charged term with many facets: it may be chosen or forced, physical or political, individual or communal, temporary or permanent, interior or exterior to the self, a remove from family, from homeland, from culture, or from a spiritual grounding. It carries the sense of disconnection, of pre-emption from an anticipated arrival point, interruption of an expected continuity.<sup>252</sup> It expresses distance from a cherished landscape

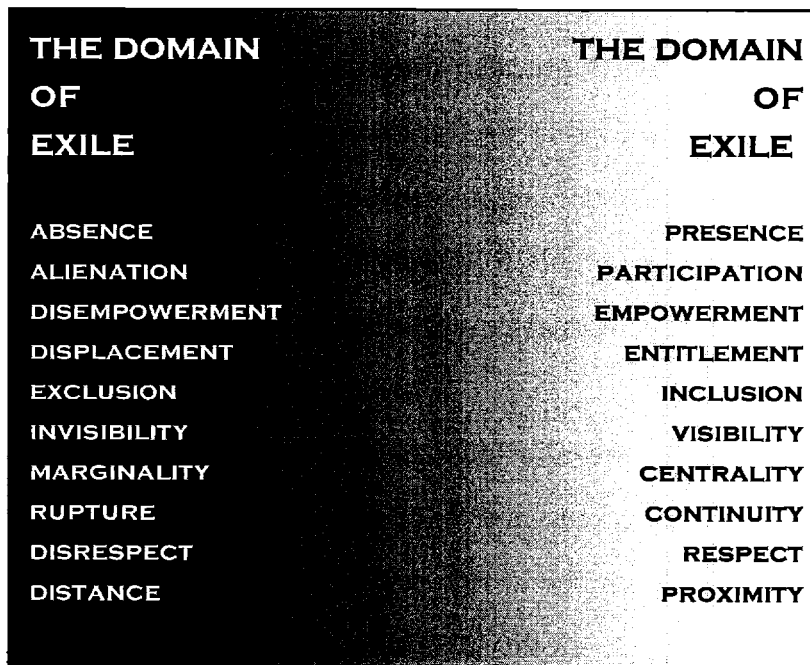
---

<sup>252</sup> Mattingly contends that "[t]he drama of narrative is based...on the experience of suffering" (1989:66). The context of Mattingly's research is a clinical environment, where suffering is literal and physical, but it can also serve as an umbrella term for the perception and/or experience of disempowerment, displacement, and alienation, for the "felt" condition of being an outsider, whether individually or as a member of some collective category. Consistent with ethnographer Vladimir Propp's observation that all "folktales begin in lack and displacement..." (referenced in Bruner 1990:88), it also corresponds to the observations of anthropologist O'Neil (1966) of the Flathead Indian community, in which a majority of adults are said to be depressed; however, in this context, the meaning of depression and its associated suffering is understood as a description of historical and structural circumstances of loss, betrayal, and oppressive power relations. In Flathead culture, the high incidence of depression is not just a condemnation of life on the reservation but has come to be a definition of adulthood, of Indian identity and moral responsibility, the combined sense of grievance and grieving.

and may grieve for some remembered old world, with a deep nostalgia for a previous (and perhaps idealized) familiar surround, both physical and social. It projects a sense of invisibility in the landscape of the present, the condition of being triaged, subject to a self-reinforcing pattern of inattention and marginality. It protests when the qualitative experience of "men and women alive" is replaced by a generic stereotype or a quantitative mass of categories and numbers, particularly statistics representing decline and categorical labeling as a "deficit community."<sup>253</sup>

---

**FACETS OF EXILE**



**Fig. 5.5** – The domain of experience represented by the trope of exile occurs across a spectrum.

---

<sup>253</sup> The "men and women alive" phrase is D. H. Lawrence, cited in Turner (in Mitchell, ed., *op. cit.*). Stone dedicates a chapter to her insights about numbers having a narrative life, as part of a story of helplessness and control (1988:131) or decline and decay (1988:133).

It also reflects the dual perspectives of departure and abandonment: exile is not only the burden of the *emigré* but also the demographic grief and grievance of those who stay behind – Sandercock's dual diaspora. She also noted more generally that "since Tönnies, discussion of the ills of modern society has been dominated by the narrative of loss, among them, the loss of community perhaps the most common" (1995: ). At the same time, the visible signs of change are literally embodied in the arrival of the strangers – who, as torn as they may be by the separation from their own homelands, may become identified locally as the invasive agent (and not merely the unwitting signal) of unwelcome transformation. In both communities, not only the "ambivalent new" but also the "anxiously nostalgic old ones," each may be implicated in the other's sense of loss, and therefore cast as antagonist in their respective historical narratives. It should be no surprise, then, that neither may be easily available to the other for positive forms of productive collaboration in an intentional community-building process.

Against this backdrop, the Charter Preparation Team's ultimate failure to expand representation on the new Chelsea School Committee, nor even to recognize its centrality for the Latino residents (and other allies), reflected back a galling political invisibility, as though they registered as mere ghosts in the mirror of the new charter. For the Latino community, this marginality elided over into a kind of perceptual exile, in which the life experience of Chelsea's Spanish-speaking immigrant families seemed to remain untranslated and opaque, not only peripheral but unsought-after in their new surroundings: the indignity of being lumped indistinguishably together in receiver Carlin's exhortation that they "learn the language and obey the law,"

on the apparent presumption that the city's Latinos did neither, at least not without being reminded, while their the worst of their English-speaking landlords ignored the fundamental housing laws with near-impunity.

Through this pattern of interpretation, diametrically-opposed constituencies came to parallel yet mutually irreconcilable positions. That paradox only makes sense in a context where antagonists simultaneously see themselves (or characterize themselves) as disenfranchised and peripheral to the decision-making process. Out of "their historically rooted aspirations, their interpretations of needs and senses of self," both the "Vote No" wing of white ethnic Chelsea residents and the Latino immigrants (and their American-born offspring) regarded themselves as displaced and forced to the margins of the Chelsea political system (or in immediate danger of being so displaced and marginalized). Then, out of their polarized diasporic identities, two postures of resistance were forged, often in conscious response to each other as well as to the receivership. The next section follows this developmental path and examines the third trope in the interpretive cycle: the trope of resistance.

*Resistance:*  
*Authority & Defiance*

No one asks  
where I am from,  
I must be  
from the country of janitors,  
I have always mopped this floor.  
Honduras, you are a squatter's camp  
outside the city  
of their understanding.

No one can speak  
my name,  
I host the fiesta  
of the bathroom,  
stirring the toilet  
like a punchbowl.  
The Spanish music of my name  
is lost  
when the guests complain  
about toilet paper.

What they say  
must be true:  
I am smart,  
but I have a bad attitude.

No one knows  
that I quit tonight,  
maybe the mop  
will push on without me,  
sniffing along the floor  
like a crazy squid  
with stringy gray tentacles.  
They will call it Jorge.

– by Martín Espada,  
"Jorge the Church Janitor Finally Quits"/  
"Por fin renuncia Jorge el conserje de la iglesia"<sup>254</sup>

---

<sup>254</sup> From *Rebellion is the Circle of a Lover's Hands* (1991:92-5); identified by the poet as taking place in a church in Cambridge, Massachusetts, rather than Chelsea.

Even though it is presented last in the proposed triad of tropes, both the metaphor and the reality of resistance may well be the presenting face of a planning conflict: the hardened positions for and against some specific proposal, the angry theater of public meetings, the partisan gestures and manifestos of opposition. The fact of resistance, therefore, often is the endpoint from which to work interpretively backward toward the origins in conflict and confrontation, and similarly, the trope of resistance may lie in the language first presented, from which to work analytically backward toward the components of conspiracy and exile, in order to understand how all three elements are compounded from a historic past into the political present. While the narrator's use of the conspiracy trope is occupied with the detection of power and the narrator's use of the exile trope describes the various relationships to power among the players, resistance identifies the response to power: the choice of action or inaction, and if action, the sort of action chosen, whether cooperation or opposition; whether existential, self-interested, or on the basis of some communal good.

---

**STATES OF RESISTANCE**

<b>ACTIVE</b>	<b>PASSIVE</b>	<b>ACTIVE</b>
<b>OPPOSITION</b>	<b>APATHY</b>	<b>SUPPORT</b>
<b>PROTEST</b>	<b>DISENGAGEMENT</b>	<b>ENGAGEMENT</b>
<b>CHALLENGE</b>	<b>DISMISSAL</b>	<b>COOPERATION</b>

**Fig. 5.6** – This chart shows how conventional opposites – *e.g.*, support and opposition – have important qualities in common in their active modes, while both can be distinguished from passive forms of resistance.

---

A word of great resonance and complexity, resistance has an honored tradition in politics and literature, and also has connotations in common usage ranging from the quixotic to the obstructionist. It represents the sometimes violent art of the principled refusal, epitomized by the anti-Nazi movements in France and among European Jews, which carries with it the potential for martyrdom.<sup>255</sup> At times, as in "Jorge the Church Janitor Finally Quits/*Por fin renuncia Jorge el conserje de la iglesia,*" it also is a key purpose and function of narrative itself.

Espada vividly captures the alienation of a Honduran custodian, how his invisibility elided over into a kind of perceptual exile, and then the stirrings of his protest against invisibility. Everything about the janitor is unacknowledged and fundamentally unknowable in this ignorant land: his country "a squatter's camp/outside the city/of their imagination," his historylessness (he and his whole diaspora has "always mopped this floor"), the "Spanish music" of his unspeakable name "lost" amid complaints from the "guests" – worthy, unlike himself, of the church's hospitality. Even his protest seems invisible ("No one knows/that I quit tonight"), and he postulates that no one will notice when he has gone, because in their eyes he is a creature contiguous with his mop ("They will call it Jorge"), pure dumb function.

But Jorge knows the mop cannot "push on without me," and his decision to quit already has reclaimed the singular power of the *refusenik* – the power to refuse, in this case, to carry out a role as necessary as it is disrespected. Besides being "smart" and having a "bad attitude," his final act of resistance

---

<sup>255</sup> Its resonances in psychiatry and biology are quite different, although related to each other.



represents a small victory, savored in anticipation, sweetened by the church's ignorance of his disruptive plan. Espada's documentation of Jorge's gesture extends its reach, the poem itself a further act of resistance – in part as a proclamation of identity, in which the custodian who "must be from the country of janitors" lifts the shroud which otherwise permits him no individual face or history – and who is not otherwise provided Said's "permission to narrate" seizes it for himself.

Narrative can be a manifestation of resistance, a counter-narrative to a received version, a revival of suppressed or neglected dimensions of a story, newly excavated. Because of both the nature of human communication and the competitive nature of "the polis," Stone notes, in a policy context "information is interpretive, incomplete, and strategically withheld," and as a result, conflict over detail in a given dispute is really disagreement about the fundamental story' (1988:21). "Moreover," observes historian Eric Foner, author of *The People Without History* and a key contributor to the revision of the history of post-Civil War Reconstruction in the American South, "forgetting some aspects of the past is as much a part of historical understanding as remembering others" – or overcoming withheld history: in Don DeLillo's novel *Libra*, Lee Harvey Oswald (its main character) is told, "This is what history consists of. It's the sum total of all the things they aren't telling us."<sup>256</sup> Using as an example the ongoing struggle in the Mideast over the legitimacy of mutually-exclusive claims to Israeli territory, Said similarly refuted the notion that facts ever "speak for themselves," as if they could be indisputably clear in their order and implications outside of an organizing

---

<sup>256</sup> *New York Times Book Review*, March 4, 2001, p. 28; quoted in John Leonard, "The Hunger Artist," *New York Review of Books*, February 22, 2001, p. 14.

narrative structure and point of view:

Facts do not at all speak for themselves, but require a socially acceptable narrative to absorb, sustain, and circulate them. Such a narrative has to have a beginning and an end: in the Palestinian case, a homeland for the resolution of its exiles since 1948. But, as Hayden White has noted in a seminal article, "narrative in general, from the folk tale to the novel, from annals to the fully realized 'history,' has to do with the topics of law, legality, legitimacy, or, more generally, *authority*" (1995:254-5).<sup>257</sup>

Thus to defy a given narrative is not just a challenge to its author but to its authority – that is, the alternate narrative is in itself a form of resistance.

---

<sup>257</sup> Said, "Permission to Narrate," *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, 1969-1994* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995 [1994]); Hayden White quote from *Critical Inquiry* (autumn 1980), later published in Mitchell, ed., *op. cit.*

## VI. CASE ANALYSIS

### *Introduction:*

#### *Narrative Analysis of the Chelsea Charter-Drafting Process*

This chapter uses the method of narrative analysis laid out in Chapter V to "listen" to the multiple narratives about the Chelsea charter-drafting process told through the voices of various participants. It examines narrative evidence from both their public discussions and their private reflections, identifying contrasting scenarios and "theories of responsibility" assembled by participants on both sides of the charter issue and calling out language where the three tropes of conspiracy, exile, and resistance can be observed. Focusing first on receiver Spence as the foremost advocate of the proposed charter, it then draws examples from an array of charter foes – representatives of both the Vote No committee and Chelsea's Commission on Hispanic Affairs, whose common rejection of the charter did not extend to reconciliation of their own mutual antagonism. This review demonstrates that each constituency interpreted motivated action, assessed the distribution of power, and then took a position of resistance – both discursive and institutional – in accordance with the tropes. Both supporters and opponents of the proposed charter displayed susceptibility to the tropes, suggesting that the appearance of the tropes is not associated exclusively with one side or the other. Moreover, the pattern of their respective narratives corresponded to the tropical cycle even within the fragmented opposition.

The following analysis focuses first on Spence both as receiver and in his specific role as charter proponent. Spence developed his own narrative

description of the charter contest that cast his opponents in increasingly conspiratorial terms and portrayed both himself and the city as a whole as prospective victim of a reactionary backlash from both ends of Chelsea's political spectrum. This analysis served as justification for his own active participation – to "resist the resisters" – in the pro-charter referendum campaign.

The Vote No wing is represented by a chorus of three aldermen who were the group's most visible (and audible) leaders, each capturing one or more aspects of the tropes in a particularly vivid way: Robert Shoemaker, who served on the CPT before resigning in protest; Marilyn Portnoy, chair of the Board of Aldermen's Governance Sub-Committee during the charter-drafting process, who declared the charter "a done deal" from which citizens had been excluded; and Donald Jordan, who regarded receivership as a conspiracy to gain control of Chelsea's industrial waterfront and the proposed charter as an elaborate fig-leaf for that hidden objective – to take airport-related land-use decisions out of the hands of the city's elected officials.

The additional solo expression of opposition belongs to Latina then-School Committee member and Hispanic Commission board president Marta Rosa, who also regarded receivership as a conspiracy, but with a different "master plan:" to rid Chelsea of its low-income immigrant population in favor of a new middle-class residential base who would enjoy the benefits of the city's transformation. Even though the pre-existing political culture had been disrupted by receivership, from her perspective, she saw opportunistic politicians – including BU's ambitious president John Silber – building their careers on Chelsea's vulnerabilities. Reading the proposed charter against the

historical backdrop of BU contract and the Latino community's ongoing efforts to gain political representation, Rosa found little in it to guarantee the full enfranchisement of the Latino community.

That the "voices" in this chapter belong to elected or appointed officials – one receiver, three aldermen, and a School Committee member – is not to privilege their perspectives. While they may seem to cut too narrow and institutional swath through the array of "voices" to be heard in the Chelsea charter-drafting process, the attention given here is in part a reflection of their prominent roles both for and against the proposed charter. It also is a manifestation of the sheer volume of material they provided for analysis. Some institutional breadth is to be gained from the fact that the School Committee member Marta Rosa already has played a highly visible role in the case history and background as president of the city's predominant Latino community-advocacy organization, Chelsea's Commission on Hispanic Affairs. The larger issue, however, is whether the proposed technique of narrative analysis is a useful way to attend to all participants (and observers) of the charter-drafting process, and whether this analysis of the case material is sufficiently persuasive to merit its use with other "voices" – and by extension, of other participatory planning processes. That question is left to the reader's judgment.

## SPENCE AS NARRATOR

To audiences both within and beyond Chelsea, Spence told two consistent, parallel, and to some extent complementary narratives about what had caused the city to reach the condition where his services were needed. Spence's "theory of responsibility" about Chelsea's municipal disintegration had two primary components: the fusion of political corruption with organized crime, and the racial tensions of demographic change. Both had at their core a conspiratorial set of actions and understandings that resulted in insiders and outsiders – citizens alienated from government and from each other, with newer and older immigrants in a successive hierarchy. He argued that because of organized crime, ordinary civic-minded white people had effectively been excluded or under-represented, as well as the communities of color. At the same time, he also acknowledged the extent to which people of color had been kept out of and ill-served by local government. In Spence's telling, both municipal morality tales had severe consequences: multiple kinds of disinvestment and disenfranchisement, forms of exile within the city's borders, that included – or excluded – a cross-section of Chelsea residents across racial and ethnic lines and whose responses ranged from passive to active resistance. Adding even more volatility to the mix was another major factor: the larger forces of global economic change that threatened to make formerly blue-collar urban enclaves such as Chelsea, in Spence's words, "communities of desperation."<sup>258</sup>

---

<sup>258</sup> Author's notes from the Boston Conference, "Shaping the Accessible Region," convened by Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the *Boston Globe*, April 14, 1994. See also Thomas C. Palmer, Jr., "Panelists Debate If Region's Focus Should Be Economy or Equality," *Boston Globe*, April 15, 1994, p. 32 (Metro/Region).

As a professional reflecting on practice amid conflict, Spence used these narratives to interpret resistance to the charter and the charter-drafting process; as participant and partisan, he used them to condemn the anti-charter effort. In creating a comprehensive charter-drafting process, going well beyond the requirements of the enabling legislation, he had raised the standard for how both the product and the process – and, by extension, his tenure at Chelsea City Hall as well as his professional reputation – would be judged. Having declared it a civic demonstration project in democratic deliberation and social-capital formation, Spence's own stake in the charter's successful passage increased accordingly. Over the course of the charter campaign, his own language became more accusatory and his portrait of the opposition became more extreme, as he began to take a more open position of righteous resistance to the resisters: not just to encourage participation in the charter referendum but to support the charter and to defeat the charter's opponents.

*The Fundamental Conspiracy:  
Organized & "Disorganized" Crime*

In most public settings, Spence emphasized organized crime as the most important long-term causal factor in Chelsea's governance crisis and economic collapse – what he identified as a fundamental and explicit conspiracy to expropriate democratic rule. Saying that he had had "no idea" how profound the organized crime was before he arrived, Spence described worrying about taking the job for other reasons: "What if you get there [and find they] were doing everything right and it's really structural? Not to worry

– it's a wreck."<sup>259</sup> "[W]hen he came to the city a year ago," the *Chelsea Record* reported when Spence formally became receiver in the fall of 1992,

he was not sure the job was doable, but now Spence holds the opposite opinion: "I am absolutely convinced that the city is viable both economically and politically...There were economic challenges and it was the city's incapacity to address those challenges that led to its collapse. But at the heart of that is the destructive role that organized crime played. Organized crime had a significant destructive influence" – so much that[, in Spence's view,] democracy had ceased to exist in Chelsea before receivership.<sup>260</sup>

According to Spence, the impetus for Chelsea's descent into unrepresentative government was not just the existence of corruption or the incompetence at City Hall but the protection it offered the bad actors: "Fear was the biggest reason citizens tolerated a government over which they had so little control."<sup>261</sup> By the summer of 1993, the level of political corruption in the city had been substantiated, with the last of the four most recent mayors admitting to taking his share through the spoils system, fully exposing the

---

<sup>259</sup> Interview, September 18, 1994; lecture at MIT, May 3, 1993. Carlin rarely mentioned the corruption issue outside of the habits of dishonest city employees. Asked if he had been briefed on the state and federal organized-crime investigations in Chelsea when he took the receiver's job, he said, "Never. Well, I was briefed a lot, but the fact that you're briefed doesn't mean you understand it. I didn't understand it. I might have understood pieces of it, but I didn't really understand it...I mean, I said to [state Attorney General] Scott Harshbarger and I said to the US Attorney's office and I said to anybody else, state police or whatever, 'Just tell me what you want me to do and I'll be helpful.' I mean, to the extent that you can pull the gaming machines out of the clubs, to the extent that we can close Caruso's Celebrity Lounge over there, or sports lounge or whatever the hell it was...I mean, I was totally supportive and cooperative...But... I saw my job as financial. First and foremost financial" (interview, July 13, 1995). He called a press report about an incident in which he reputedly tried to remove illegal video games from a club without being aware of an undercover investigator there who had not yet completed his task "plausible." In an interview with Ted Hampton of the *Bond Buyer*, he confirmed that he traveled with an armed MBTA police officer as his bodyguard ("Chelsea Receiver Trims Finances of 'Tough Town,'" June 16, 1992, p. 6), a sign of how serious the investigation was and its potential fallout. At least one assistant receiver's phone had a speed-dial button direct to the feds.

<sup>260</sup> "Spence Becomes Receiver Today," *Chelsea Record*, November 18, 1992, p. 1.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*



clockwork of what Spence called "the old Chelsea." With "a generation of leadership in the community being targeted by the feds," that political culture was in the process of being replaced by what he insisted was "the new Chelsea," whose slogan became, "It's About Teamwork" – presumably a different kind of team.<sup>262</sup>

Spence was not satisfied with blaming incompetence alone, nor the burden of escalating union contracts, not even the general category of political corruption as the source of the trouble that had landed the city in its pre-receivership crisis. Instead, he promoted a particular understanding of Chelsea's particular form of corruption, which he described as a highly effective conspiracy to wrest the municipal government out of the hands of the local population and to control it via decades-old links between the Mob and the police, a network that had turned Chelsea City Hall into a black market in negative social capital and controlled the city through fear:

The threat of violence was central to the problem of the city. Bad cops are scarier than the Mob because they are licensed to kill. They ran teenage hooker operations, they sold drugs...How could you break [that nexus] without a dramatic intervention [such as receivership]...to recapture democracy?<sup>263</sup>

*From "Disorganized" Crime  
To Disenfranchisement*

By 1994, the portrait of government-by-conspiracy had become the jumping-off point for Spence's standard patter about Chelsea's precipitous fall. On the nationally-syndicated radio program *The Connection*, Spence told listeners,

---

<sup>262</sup> Lecture at MIT, May 3, 1993.

<sup>263</sup> Lecture at MIT, May 3, 1993.

Chelsea is not a case where the voters just failed through their own stupidity. This is a case of a conspiracy by organized crime to take democratic rights from the voters...This is a city where organized crime had infiltrated in a way that was far more pervasive than in most other communities. That's why democracy fundamentally failed in Chelsea. It's not because the voters were stupid. It's because organized crime managed to get a foothold decades ago, and then built off of that foothold, and through a combination of pay-off and intimidation took over a significant portion of government in Chelsea.<sup>264</sup>

Spence filled in the details of the conspiratorial scenario:

Why did it happen in Chelsea? It happened in Chelsea because Chelsea was the point of entry for immigrants in the greater Boston area. It had always been a poor community. It has always been a community of immigrants, and immigrant communities are desperately vulnerable. People who often don't have the language. They don't have access to government. They're frequently not even citizens, yet. They're ripe for the plucking by organized crime who will offer them opportunities that may not seem to be available elsewhere or intimidate them, sometimes, into participation. So Chelsea became a center for organized-crime activities...<sup>265</sup>

Casting Chelsea's troubles in conspiratorial terms – as the effects of a plausible chain of causality with specific motives and a *modus operandi*, a set of actors and a set of institutional relationships that enabled them to carry out their strategy – allowed Spence to define the goal of receivership more narrowly: freedom from the organized-crime conspiracy.

Indeed, it enabled, almost required, Spence to present his task and the city's improvement in restorative rather than radical terms. By treating corrupt-business-as-usual as an aberration – however persistent, habitual, and routinized – from a norm that had to be restored, Spence then could talk

---

<sup>264</sup> *The Connection*, December 15, 1994.

<sup>265</sup> *The Connection*, December 15, 1994.

about recovery as a sequence in which the city moved from "spectacular troubles" to the "ordinary battles...that every community is engaged in," emphasizing the return to normalcy:

I think Chelsea is on its way back. It's certainly, I think,...back in the community of cities and towns in Massachusetts in good standing....[I]t's like sort of returning to health. It means you get just the ordinary troubles of ordinary life as opposed to the quite spectacular troubles that Chelsea suffered before.<sup>266</sup>

Spence used similar terms for the city's changed status as a drug distribution point, no longer an open-air bazaar:

...[T]he drug market has, I'm sure, not disappeared or far from it. Although I think it has been quite dramatically reduced. When I got there, you literally had people dealing on Broadway in wide open and daylight. The merchants were saying that people were afraid to walk down the main street because of the amount of drug activity. It's not so anymore. We've closed about five bars that several of which were dealing cocaine out of the bar. That kind of wide-open drug traffic is gone. We're now engaged again in the ordinary battles against drugs that every community is engaged in. Drugs are no longer the first issue for merchants — now they're screaming about parking enforcement on Broadway.<sup>267</sup>

If the sign of municipal recovery (and thereby the receivership's success) is the difference between parking tickets and drug-dealers on Broadway, it would be hard to come up with a more simultaneously powerful and mundane symbol of restoration as distinct from innovation. It served to simplify and clarify the task: the receiver had been dispatched to Chelsea

---

<sup>266</sup> *The Connection*, December 15, 1994.

<sup>267</sup> *The Connection*, December 15, 1994. At MIT, Spence was asked, "Where did the drugs go?" His answer: "They're screaming in Revere and Everett and East Boston" — an indication that the problem had been displaced rather than solved. All politics indeed is local. Lecture, May 3, 1993.

primarily to permit the normal difficulties, tensions, and contradictions of American urban life in the late twentieth century to proceed in "the way [that] democracy is messy."<sup>268</sup> Returning Chelsea to normal meant scouring out the previous dirty political culture and replacing it with the merely "messy." With that as the criterion, and even with assorted recounts and the German seat in dispute, Spence could hail the first elections held under the new charter as a definitive success, because

I don't think anybody looks to this council and says, "Uh-oh, this is a council that's going to be influenced by organized crime." I don't think that's the case.<sup>269</sup>

Directing public attention to his own conspiracy benchmark – freedom from political control by organized crime – allowed Spence to characterize first the charter and then the results of the City Council race as sequential signals that norms had changed, and that the change in those norms represented the receivership's success in detoxifying the political culture.

To cast the city's criminal base – whether organized or disorganized – as the basic determinant of Chelsea's political life had two distinct effects. It aggregated the perpetrators, and it equalized their victims. This part of Spence's analysis cut across racial, ethnic, and to some extent class lines. Any differential between Anglos and non-Anglos narrowed considerably if both

---

<sup>268</sup> *The Connection*, December 15, 1994. Spence's task also was bounded by a key insight about low-functioning organizations: "There's a mythology that a crisis is terrific: [that because] structures are broken, you can innovate like crazy – no. You can't go from incapacity [to innovation]. Innovation comes from a high-capacity organization pushing the limits. It's hard to take [an organization] from failure to innovation...[When] highly competent organizations face a crisis, the response [may be] innovation. Highly incompetent organizations are unlikely" to innovate successfully. Lecture at MIT, May 3, 1993.

<sup>269</sup> *The Connection*, December 15, 1994.

had been methodically driven out of political participation by what Spence termed "misgovernment enforced by fear."<sup>270</sup> He rarely missed an opportunity to emphasize that because of the nature of political corruption in Chelsea, "Politics had been disconnected from all but a tiny minority," disenfranchising both white and non-white residents from across the demographic spectrum.<sup>271</sup> It was a tableau in which the bad guys, primarily if not exclusively white, had kept anyone without good connections, whether white or non-white, out of local governance – a sort of internal exile of not just people of color but of other white people, and linking their respective exclusions, for some the same reasons and by some of the same agents.

*Internal Exile:*

*Two Forms of Anglo Alienation*

Spence's archetype for white Chelseans who had walked away from the political process altogether out of fear as well as disgust was attorney and would-be reformer Alexander Nappan, who Spence appointed to the city's licensing board during receivership, and who became Spence's stock illustration of how "Anglos also were shut out [before receivership] because it was dangerous to get too deeply involved in local politics."<sup>272</sup> A prickly personality and political activist, Nappan in the early 1980s had made his own inquiries into Chelsea corruption and "figured out who was behind all this," recognizing at a certain point that "he was really risking his life" if he pursued it any further.<sup>273</sup> In Spence's description,

---

<sup>270</sup> Lecture at MIT, May 3, 1993.

<sup>271</sup> Lecture at MIT, April 21, 1994.

<sup>272</sup> Lecture at MIT, May 3, 1993.

<sup>273</sup> Lecture at MIT, April 21, 1994; Alexander Nappan, interview, December 10, 1994.

It wasn't so much the Mob he was afraid of, but the corrupt police officers, because they had license to kill. The cadre involved in prostitution and drug-dealing [made] Chelsea a place where people live[d] in literal fear of criminal violence around corrupt activity[,...]local tyranny absolutely enforced by terror. Nappan walked away, did his anti-corruption work elsewhere until [being appointed to the Excise Board]. Others looked the other way – you stay away, you close your eyes. Others were buying in.<sup>274</sup>

Installing Nappan as chair of the board with local licensing control of Chelsea's bars, clubs, and restaurants thus was both a substantive and highly symbolic move to break permanently the ties between the bars, the drug trade, the gambling rackets, the crooked cops, and the politicians who accommodated (or thrived on) those relationships.<sup>275</sup> Along with federal prosecution of political corruption, it reinforced the message that "the citizenry was freed from the fear of violence that [had] prevented them from making changes in local government," and thus also represented the "opening of opportunity to changing politics in the city for older Anglos" as well as for the city's newer populations.

Distinct from the reformers and challengers from within the Anglo community was another set of key players, particularly incumbent aldermen whose hostilities were arrayed against the receiver, the federal investigators, and the new immigrant communities alike, a defensive posture against all intruders. In his analysis of the members of the Board of Aldermen who became the core of the Vote No movement, Spence explicitly connected the hard-core white resistance – to receivership in general and the charter in

---

<sup>274</sup> Lecture at MIT, April 21, 1994.

<sup>275</sup> Although boards and commissions were advisory during receivership, Spence gave the Excise Board a strong role in adjudicating disputes over closing times, license violations, and license transfers, all extremely controversial in a city with almost fifty liquor licenses spread across less than two square miles of dry land.

particular – to their class-based defensive distrust that buttressed a self-image of victimization:

There's a sense of inferiority, a lot of fear...a piece of working-class mentality [is that you're] always experienc[ing] authority as abusive, and therefore the only way to govern your circumstances is to resist. They've built their politics around mistrust of everyone..."How can you know what they say is true, how you tell anything, because it's all lies. We've been lied to by our own for about 50 years." The same guy stole your watch, you'd be an idiot to trust him...It's really a question of whether or not the community [will] have enough confidence to engage the world and protect itself by its wits, or persist [in that defensive stance]. [My chief of staff] Steve McGoldrick calls this the fundamental victimization model. The only safe place is "no," the nihilist politics of [former mayor] Jim Mitchell...In a world that's out of control, "vote no" makes sense...It's central to the question of alliance-building, [because] in a place that's out of control, the only place of safety is your group.<sup>276</sup>

Spence's analysis had the reflective tone of a considered understanding of how these rejectionist aldermen might have come to see themselves in a condition of internal exile that led to an almost desperate need to resist any proposed change that enlarged the scope of political representation in the city. But his sociological interest declined as their opposition to the charter intensified.

Although Spence originally posed his question on social-capital formation in Chelsea as an exercise in creating "ownership," many within the Vote No contingent in fact did feel ownership – exclusive ownership of the Chelsea franchise – and to that Spence was politically and morally opposed. At the same time, however, Spence grew increasingly impatient with and unsympathetic to Latino charter opponents for whom the charter provisions did not offer what they considered sufficient net gains in access and

---

<sup>276</sup> Interview, June 6, 1994.

representation to merit their support. Over time, Spence seemed to reverse his original question: who, in fact, needed to be marginalized so that broader political ownership of Chelsea's governance could occur? This paradox ran through Spence's tenure in Chelsea, but it was at its peak in the final weeks before the charter referendum, when positions of resistance on both sides crystallized under pressure. The social process of defeating the charter's opponents had become as important to Spence as the charter itself, and he redoubled his efforts to guarantee passage of the document that would end his days in Chelsea.

*Spence & the Latino Community:  
Differing Definitions of Disenfranchisement*

In his own sweeping analysis, Spence had framed receivership as a "peculiarly American improvisation" in response to "a set of issues challenging democratic institutions to the point where they can't deal with [them]...usually issues of race and diversity."<sup>277</sup> That insight did not mean, however, that he and Latino advocates would agree on the shape and character of reform at Chelsea City Hall, and the question of how to forge and enforce adequate Latino representation and access to local "democratic institutions" was an ongoing source of contention between them. From the Commission's perspective, Spence appeared more prepared to speak in the abstract about Latino disempowerment than to work with activists who were challenging the city's political establishment for more equitable representation and power-sharing. His failure to support district School Committee seats in the new charter infuriated Commission members and other progressive activists – all the more after his public statements that a

---

<sup>277</sup> Lecture at MIT, May 3, 1993.



district/at-large combination would have been his own personal preference, but that he left the decision to the CPT. To them, despite his own investment in the new charter (and its key features), Spence seemed to define Latino enfranchisement outside the charter's provisions for a new political order and to abandon the Latino community at the moment his involvement was needed most.

Spence was far more versed than his predecessor in the policy issues and existential realities of poverty, racism, and economic dislocation, and he formed an alliance with the Latino leadership when the siting of the new Chelsea schools became controversial. But Spence seemed unable to tolerate community-organizing strategies he considered confrontational. Spence was particularly angered when the Commission filed – without warning – its December 1993 federal lawsuit against the city over Latino students' lack of access to the regional vocational school.<sup>278</sup> The frustration often was mutual. It was galling to Commission president Marta Rosa, for example, that the receivership won full credit for resolving issues that the Latino community had worked on for years before Carlin or Spence came to Chelsea:

For example, the fact that there were no police that spoke Spanish, that the Fire Department mistreated the few minorities that were in there, the fact that public housing was not going to the Latino community – all of the things that we know are barriers to the community, that the small businessmen on Broadway who are Latino were getting shafted and not receiving any resources from the city or any support. All of the issues we had outlined in our reports and that we knew from our door-knocking – all of the housing issues and tenant

---

<sup>278</sup> Rosa said that the group was responding to "so many complaints" and, despite having "pushed the city," had seen little progress. She noted that Spence seemed to have "taken [the suit] personally" rather than "respecting the community position," as if to say, "this Marta, you can't trust her; no matter how much you involve her, she's gonna do what the community wants..."; in her view, her role was to "stand behind what the group decides." Interview, April 6, 1995. Spence in return accused her of "left-adventurism." Interview, June 25, 1995.

issues. You know, the fact that City Hall had no bilingual staff, and that was atrocious. And these weren't new issues. These were issues that we had been working on for several years before receivership. It just so happened that receivership can now take credit for some of that progress, because they came in at the right time...

You know, it's like we had done the legwork. We had called the Police Department to the challenge. We had accused or challenged the five officers who were abusing the Hispanic community physically. Those names had been read at the Board of Aldermen meeting a year before receivership. We had begun the meetings with the police department to see how we were going to fix this – you know, the fact that there were no Latino policemen, and people were getting beat up by the police and harassed, and they were going through houses without a warrant...We had...a whole campaign about "if you've been harassed or suffered police brutality, call us." The police department hated the Commission, basically, because we had called them to the task. When receivership came in,...all that groundwork had been done, so it was easy to implement a plan that said, "We need Latino police," which now the receivership claims a lot of the credit for.<sup>279</sup>

To Rosa, the corruption issues had eclipsed the police-brutality charges her community had documented since the 1970s. While the receivers had been given a unique window of political opportunity to implement some of the reforms long demanded by Latino activists, the lack of even private recognition that the receiver's action was no solo act of courageous leadership but the culmination of two decades of community organizing rankled Rosa and other local advocates. It also seemed to indicate that police misconduct was taken seriously, investigated, and punished only on behalf of Anglo Chelsea. For his part, Spence commented with intended irony on the ways that his period of "authoritarianism [had] serv[ed] the Latino community well," disrupting the exclusionary political culture that the Commission and others had not yet defeated at the ballot box.

---

<sup>279</sup> Interview, April 6, 1995.

Spence detected important generational differences in the Latino community, contrasting the "tentativeness" of "the first generation not [being] fully invested, with lingering hopes of return to a home country and a sense that doors were shut in their face when they tried to participate" in Chelsea's political life, with "the emergence of a younger generation under 30" years old" naming Juan Vega as a primary example and adding "They're not mourning anything: it's theirs, the community they live in today."<sup>280</sup> He also included in that category several younger members of the Anglo community, particularly Paul Nowicki, a 24-year-old parole officer who was president of the Board of Alderman during the charter-drafting process and who had shown diplomatic adeptness in moving between the two groups.

"Fundamentally," Spence noted, "these are people who grew up in a multi-lingual city," for whom the immediate future of Chelsea was of more urgency than the nostalgic landscape of a lost homeland, whether within the city limits or elsewhere.<sup>281</sup>

*Receivership & "Ownership:"  
Resistance & the Role of the Receiver*

There was another dimension to the "ownership" equation: the relationship between Spence's claim on local authority and the city's own, and the extent to which he was willing to release that claim. Towards the end of receivership, Spence began to articulate an increasingly narrow view of the receiver's role, retreating from his previously more directive and interventionist job description and translating the political task into a longer-term generational process that the receiver could help accelerate but could not

---

<sup>280</sup> Lecture at MIT, April 21, 1994. In 1999, Vega became the first Latino city council president in Massachusetts.

<sup>281</sup> Interview, June 6, 1994.

replace. At the same time, his own perception of the conspiratorial efforts of Vote No to undermine and defeat the charter drew him into an activist stance quite different from his own self-description, since he was unwilling to leave the scene without establishing a new set of ground-rules by which the city's political evolution would continue after the receiver departed. With the charter at stake, Spence's actions belied his words. Like any mayor of a small city with a referendum question on the ballot, he suddenly was faced with the prospect of winning or losing. The pre-eminent importance of the charter seemed to blind him to the contradiction, while the charter's opponents capitalized on the receiver's not-so-hidden hand in the pro-charter campaign.

By April 1994, when the CPT was hammering out the language for the charter and facing its first waves of organized opposition, Spence had begun to rewrite his job description significantly. While still including tasks beyond the budget and the organizational chart, Spence's view of the receiver's role was evolving into a facilitative rather than a directive approach to Chelsea's political reconstruction. Earlier in his tenure at Chelsea City Hall, Spence had said he had begun to "recognize the limits of authority – [because] the consolidation of the receivership doesn't do it."<sup>282</sup> In the context of the charter-drafting process, however, he re-defined his role as more of an active broker in "managing relations [and] negotiations," who had a responsibility to "exercise power so that [the participants] can get a different deal...The role of the receivership [is that it] lends its empowerment to give some people a bulwark, behind which they can get confident and then jump-start the process" of community-building.<sup>283</sup> Spence reflected back at his choice among

---

<sup>282</sup> Lecture at MIT, May 3, 1993.

<sup>283</sup> Lecture at MIT, April 21, 1994.

the three possible charter-development strategies in the Chelsea environment to illuminate his argument. An elected charter commission, he argued, would have pitched communities against each other in an electoral contest defaulting to the prior political establishment's advantage, and "Anglos would have been empowered to develop a charter whose purpose was to suppress Hispanic power." A "receiver-generated charter," on the other hand, would have deferred to "my own political bent to empower" whomever he chose:

If I had imposed the charter, it would have perpetuated...the old politics of just-say-no...The only thing the pols understand is "bash the executive"...[T]he central dynamic is [the old habit]: people scream at the mayor. The politics within the Anglo communities has got to change. If I imposed the charter, it would only promote the impulse to desperately try to attack or undo what the receiver did, assault the city manager, taking no responsibility for the outcome – and you're back to the situation that got the city into receivership.<sup>284</sup>

Alternatively, the "middle way" of the "mediated process" offered "some opportunity for some development of a common agreement, subject to the majority vote of all. Then the issue is which existing enfranchised voters will consent" to that agreement.<sup>285</sup> In the weeks before the referendum, he set the charter-drafting process in the context of the larger task of moving toward a new political culture, with cautious optimism about the results:

I am significantly more hopeful, depending on the day of the week. I think you can point to significant changes in way in which the political culture functions...I'm not sure it's strong enough to survive the transition [from receivership to self-government]...[But] there is alliance-building going on across ethnic lines. There are more people in positions of authority [who] understand alliance-building, and more of it going on.<sup>286</sup>

---

<sup>284</sup> Interview, June 6, 1994.

<sup>285</sup> Interview, June 6, 1994.

<sup>286</sup> Interview, June 6, 1994.

Spence said he was persuaded that the leadership for this alliance-building was emerging from Vega and Nowicki's cohort of political activists in both the Anglo and the Latino communities who "see [the possibility of alliance-building] happening and see it as [the city's] only hope. They have the sense that the next round [*i.e.*, a positive outcome in the charter referendum] is the last chance, and they're going to fight like hell to make it work."<sup>287</sup>

The generational transition cut across another important Chelsea constituency and the transformation of its social capital, in a kind of currency exchange:

...[T]o the extent that Chelsea is in recovery,...[y]ou can't just do it by receivership in truth. We were talking about the police department. The Chelsea police officers themselves were absolutely critical to turning that department around. We had the great good fortune that the problems of corruption were in a small cadre of senior officers who we were either able to force out or who moved into retirement or, in one case, went to prison. The FBI tells me that a great majority of Chelsea officers wanted this department cleaned up. They wanted it straightened out. It really is true. It requires a combination of the will of a community to see change with an opportunity provided, hopefully, by an intervention like receivership.<sup>288</sup>

The receiver's role in that process had been twofold: in cooperating with the federal investigation and in changing the face of the police department. By the end of the indictments, convictions, and opportunistic retirements, 80 percent of the force had been there for less than 10 years, and there were 13 officers of color (three black and 10 Latino) out of 73.<sup>289</sup> The new chief, a

---

<sup>287</sup> Lecture at MIT, April 21, 1994.

<sup>288</sup> *The Connection*, December 15, 1994.

<sup>289</sup> Lecture at MIT, April 21, 1994.

seasoned veteran of Jersey City who was hired with citizen participation in the interviewing process, emphasized community policing. In Spence's organizational model, the receiver helped set the threshold conditions for a major transformation that was and would remain a task for the new officers and their "will" to create a new culture in the police department, rather than the receiver's prerogative alone.

This depiction of the receiver's semi-detached role might leave an impression that Spence had taken a conscientious position deferring to the longer-term process of coalition politics in the creation of a new political culture in Chelsea. But in the context of the charter referendum, it was clear that Spence would defer to the local only after the foundation represented by the charter had been set in electoral concrete. As the referendum approached, Spence began to describe the "Vote No" wing in less academic terms and more as a retrogressive faction clinging to the remnants of a corrupted and exclusive order. He took the reciprocally hostile view that since the charter would change the balance of power,

[t]he people who know [that] are now fighting furiously [to stop it]. The Vote No campaign is not really about the institutional details of the charter but the whole political background. They have no coherent arguments. The charter team cuts their legs from under them by these changes, because the habitual landscape is being changed. "No" is a safe place to be.<sup>290</sup>

Fueled with competitive energy as the referendum loomed, Spence

---

<sup>290</sup> Interview, June 6, 1994. In his op-ed piece in the June 17 *Chelsea Record*, he also argued that the charter "means more than the particulars," urging voters to accept the document as a whole even if, like himself, there were provisions with which they disagreed. The charter thus became a symbol of democratic deliberation in part by the willingness of the voters to accept its imperfections.

intensified his intervention and advocacy on behalf of the charter. He worked the phones in his office and made impassioned public statements in favor of the charter and against its opponents, as though the receivership period in Chelsea's political history would be judged by those it frustrated as much as by those it empowered – by those who lost the charter battle as much as by those who won. It was an aggressive interpretation of the judicious role he earlier had described, moving well beyond the protective "bulwark" the receiver theoretically offered while the citizens of Chelsea deliberated over whether to give or to withhold political life for the document as proposed.

However, once the ground-rules had changed with the passage of the new charter (and its swift affirmation by the state legislature and the governor), Spence seemed to take the Olympian view more in keeping with his strict-constructionist rhetoric. In the battle over the hiring of the first city manager, the last turning point in the transition to municipal self-governance, Spence maintained his commitment to turn the hiring decision entirely over to the new Chelsea City Council. Rumors abounded about which candidate had the receiver's backing – less abstractly, about whether or not Spence supported Santagate (and thus whether or not any other candidate had a fighting chance to be selected). Privately, Spence expressed a personal ambivalence towards Santagate's candidacy, citing the danger of sending mixed signals about the degree of change in such a famously parochial political environment. But he vowed to let the hiring process take its own course; meanwhile, his staff unilaterally opposed installing anyone with strong local roots, however uncontaminated by the toxic soil of Chelsea politics, and worked behind the scenes to make their opposition known to key councilors. Spence seemed to consider his job to be all but ceremonially done, and his own campaign of



resistance to the city's old guard appeared to be over. As the contentious selection of the new city manager proceeded, Spence kept a new political distance.

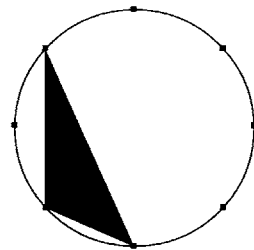
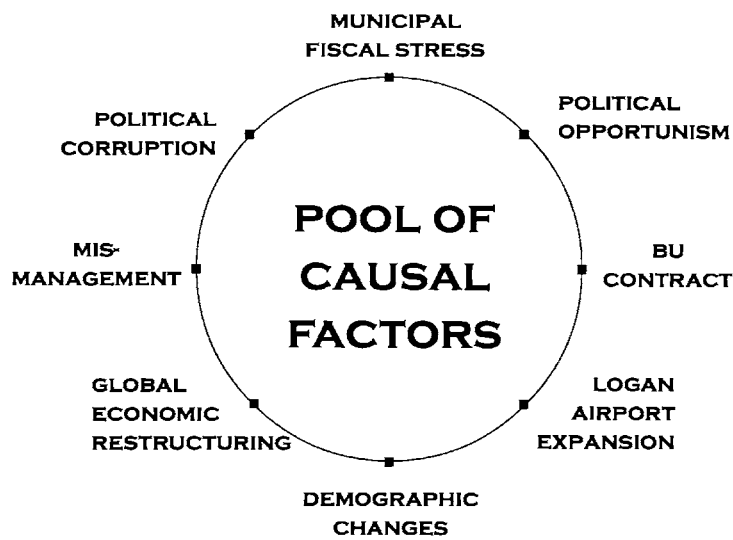
*Conclusion:*

*Spence's Theory of Responsibility*

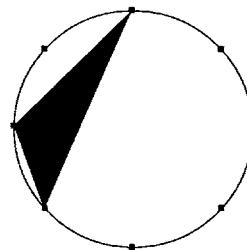
Spence built his narrative about the onset of receivership and its peculiar mandates from particular causal factors he identified consistently: political corruption in league with organized crime, demographic change, and the economic dislocations of deindustrialization. By contrast, Carlin had explicitly named mismanagement, public-employee unions as primary feeder of municipal fiscal stress, and parochial efforts to fight off demands of post-industrial economy. In each case, their "theories of responsibility" framed what they saw as their most immediate tasks: for Carlin, expanding the tax base, eliminating costs and incompetence in City Hall, and reining in the public-employee union contracts; for Spence, the development of new political and social institutions through processes of democratic deliberation to build, along with continued job growth.

Plotted on causality maps (see Fig. 6.1), the similarities and differences in their positions are starkly visible. They both recognized the impact on Chelsea of the global process of economic restructuring, but that is the only factor they have in common. Carlin emphasized the public-employee union contracts as a major contributor to the city's underlying fiscal stress along with the incompetence in City Hall, while Spence highlighted the political corruption connected to "disorganized crime" as well as the impact of racial and ethnic hostilities toward the city's newest immigrants. It is a striking visualization of the differences in the two receivers' philosophies, approaches, and temperaments.

## THEORIES OF RESPONSIBILITY: SPENCE & CARLIN



**SPENCE**



**CARLIN**

**Fig. 6.1** – Receivers Carlin and Spence both recognized the impact on Chelsea of the global process of economic restructuring, but it was the only factor they held in common. Carlin emphasized public-employee union contracts as a major contributor to the city’s underlying fiscal stress along with incompetence in City Hall, while Spence highlighted political corruption connected to “disorganized crime” as well as the impact of racial and ethnic hostilities toward the city’s newest immigrants.



By both analysis and conviction, Spence dedicated his tenure as receiver to the formation of a new municipal supply of social capital. Although Spence did not use the social-capital vocabulary in his public addresses in Chelsea, in his private reflections he had made direct reference to Putnam's construct in describing his civic mission in Chelsea. Spence had focused his intellectual attention on not only the resuscitation of the city's political infrastructure but also the underlying issues of the city's civil society – not just interests, but relationships and renewed forms of engagement. He had expressed increasing concern about leaving a political vacuum after receivership by promoting "an over-reliance on centralized authority that succeeds too well at making the trains run on time, undermining democratic institutions."<sup>291</sup> Thus the importance to Spence of "not making politics the villain:"

People have tendency to go home, close the door, and let the receiver do it. If you convince people that the villain is politics, then there is no solution other than an authoritarian system. It's an easy game in receivership: "I'm here to clean up the mess the pols [made], and I'm not a pol, so I can do it." If you argue from the position that politics is inherently corrupt, then you further disable the community from self-government.<sup>292</sup>

It was too easy, he said, to "work by fiat, push things through," perpetuating both dependency and irresponsibility.<sup>293</sup> In a direct analogy to Putnam's description of southern Italy's *barones*, Spence observed that in Chelsea, "the barons of this realm were elected officials," with a "clientelist dependent population," and suggested that his role in Chelsea was to move the city to a northern-Italian accountability model, to "try and encourage growth of

---

<sup>291</sup> Lecture at MIT, April 21, 1994. Knowing Spence's familiarity with Putnam's longitudinal study of social capital in Italy, it would be hard not to interpret his remark as a reference to the fascist Mussolini regime.

<sup>292</sup> Lecture at MIT, April 21, 1994.

<sup>293</sup> Lecture at MIT, April 21, 1994.

constitutional groups, a politics of constitutional responsibility."<sup>294</sup>

Peculiarly suited to Spence's largely uncharted territory in Chelsea and to his career as serial receiver, the social-capital vernacular captured a cluster of gnawing issues and permitted fluidity in response to them. It is not a vocabulary that comes with a program and a how-to manual, locked into traditional structures of community participation. It left Spence an open prescriptive field for designing alternative approaches to participation, such as the charter-drafting process: a mediation exercise on the consensus model, evanescent and – while there was debate about its actual representativeness – eclectic. It was the underpinning to Spence's insistence, to his many skeptics, that he was not committed to a particular vision of how the charter should read but to the conversation itself. It is consistent with his argument that the hide-bound, hierarchical structures of government and other institutions were giving way to "a post-bureaucratic era," in which the apparatus of democratic decision-making had to be more *ad hoc* and lateral rather than permanent and hierarchical.<sup>295</sup>

It also is consistent with his own career history and management style.<sup>296</sup> Despite his broader reputation as a community-builder, Spence was not by nature a builder of permanent institutions. Perhaps as befits receivership as a transitory period of political infrastructure repair, he was instead a marketer of transitional processes, of which the Charter Preparation Team was his

---

<sup>294</sup> Lecture at MIT, April 21, 1994.

<sup>295</sup> Author's notes, lecture at MIT, September 5, 1995. In a previous lecture (April 21, 1994), Spence referred to Gerald E. Frug, "The Ideology of Bureaucracy in American Law," *Harvard Law Review*, Vol. 97 (April 1984), pp. 1277-1388.

<sup>296</sup> See J. Pynoos, *Breaking the Rules: Bureaucracy and Reform in Public Housing* (New York: Plenum Press, 1986).

primary example and of which the charter itself was emblematic: a document that, by its own embedded rules, is subject to revision on a five- and then a ten-year cycle, in a sort of social-capital family reunion.

## OTHER NARRATORS, OTHER THEORIES OF RESPONSIBILITY

This section reviews the narrative scenario-building and rhetorical strategies of the charter's opponents – two separate reservoirs of anti-charter sentiment. This review demonstrates the remarkable commonalities and consistencies in interpretation between these mutually-hostile camps – symmetries even amid enmities. Despite the antagonism between the rejectionist wing of Vote No aldermen and Chelsea's Commission's on Hispanic Affairs, the case analysis highlights how their respective critiques of both the charter and the charter-drafting process were mirror-images. Moreover, to the extent that each identified the other as a privileged constituency and themselves as a disadvantaged target, the echoing language of both camps continued to cycle through the conspiracy and exile tropes, reinforcing an overarching resistance to what each construed as the advancement of the other – reflecting their strange symmetry of their anxieties.

Speculation arose constantly during the charter-drafting process from within each skeptical constituency to varying degrees of intensity, generating an often quite sophisticated set of scenarios. Whether these scenarios were complementary or contradictory to each other, they were finely sketched and shaded with nuances derived from the data at hand against detailed historical backdrops. The primary targets of these speculations were:

- ◆ the representativeness of the Charter Preparation Team (CPT),
- ◆ the true extent of the range of choices available to the CPT,
- ◆ the relationship between the mediator and the receiver's office, and



- ◆ the integrity of the campaigns both for and against the charter.

Neither the sweat equity of citizen participation nor the consensus ground-rules for the CPT's work eliminated suspicions that Spence had hand-picked the membership – and thus also circumscribed the range of opinions on the committee charged with assembling the charter as well as the political space available for discovery or improvisation within the team's deliberations. Moreover, mediator Susan Podziba's actions were scrutinized constantly for signs of Spence's undue influence on the mediation process and its product, or that the charter had been pre-determined in some way.

In contrast to the preceding detailed analysis of Spence's language and logic, the following section is multi-vocal, presenting a series of "voices of resistance." First the scene is set by Robert Shoemaker, who as one of three aldermanic representatives on the CPT stepped down from that position in protest midway through the charter-drafting process. The scene is set by a recitation of his resignation letter, which served as a catalyst for the first definitive public expressions of opposition to the charter. A longer statement published in the *Chelsea Record* with Shoemaker's byline just before the June 1994 referendum provides a thorough-going recitation of the Vote No position in the form of a parable of disillusionment with the charter-drafting process.

This rhetorical prelude is followed by the analysis of two voices of Vote No, whose rationales for resistance were based on some common factors but with important divergences in their explanatory variables: Marilyn Portnoy, who saw the receivership itself and charter-drafting process as part of a larger

pattern of deception by and opportunism for politicians and career bureaucrats; and Donald Jordan, who developed an elaborate scenario in which the imposition of receivership had masked a state-led land-grab along the contested Chelsea waterfront. Shoemaker's resignation letter was addressed to Portnoy in her capacity as chair of the board's governance Sub-Committee, and the subsequent section describes and examines her explosive public reaction to it as one of many signals that the charter process was something other than a fair and open debate of Chelsea's future. Jordan acknowledged these manipulations but tried to focus Chelsea's eyes on a different prize.

At the other end of political spectrum, Latino opposition to the proposed charter is crystallized in the words of Marta Rosa, president of Chelsea's Commission on Hispanic Affairs throughout the receivership period and the city's pioneering Latino elected official. She uses different data out of a different reservoir of experience to construct a parallel but distinct narrative about receivership and the charter-drafting process as well as her opposition to the charter. The section closes with a comparison of causality maps between the two anti-charter camps – a comparison which makes their areas of overlap and divergence even more visible.

*The Narratives of "Vote No:"  
Parables of Disillusionment*

At about the halfway point of the charter-drafting process, the Board of Aldermen's Committee on Rules, Ordinances, and Governance had a communication from one of its members, Robert Shoemaker, a former police officer who was a first-term ward alderman. Shoemaker had been serving as one of three aldermanic representatives to the Charter Preparation Team, and his participation had been marked by contentiousness, particularly with mediator Susan Podziba. In a letter addressed to "Madam Alderman" Marilyn Portnoy, chair of the governance Sub-Committee, Shoemaker outlined his reasons for stepping down from his assignment, and at the April 26 meeting, as part of her routine report to the full board, Portnoy read the letter into the public record. Periodically looking up to make eye contact with the community-cable television camera that transmitted the aldermen's public sessions to the citizenry, Portnoy had an edge in her voice as she recited Shoemaker's chronicle of his transition from believer to skeptic:

As you know, I was appointed by President of our Board, Paul Nowicki, to serve on the City's Charter Preparation Team and to report back to your committee. I was very pleased to receive this assignment. I considered it an exciting opportunity to see Chelsea shape it's [sic] own future. Now, having observed the process, and having concluded that this process does not do and cannot do what was originally intended, I recently requested of Paul that he replace me.

In my opinion, Marilyn, the people of Chelsea never received the kind of educational material that would have opened them to the possibilities for city government and would have encouraged their involv[e]ment. I heard from several Ward 4 people who were upset at the format and the untimeliness of the recent mailing.

The process has been far too heavily influenced by the Receiver's office. I do not

know whether this is what he intended.

Finally, again, in my opinion, the facilitating team of Podziba and Miller were billed as politically disinterested, strictly process people. To my observation [sic] this is not true. But more importantly, I am afraid they are creating a situation where a charter may be imposed upon the citizens of Chelsea, before it is voted upon.

You can see that feeling the way I do, some other member of the Board of Aldermen should serve in this capacity. There are a number of outstanding Chelsea citizens who are continuing within this process.<sup>297</sup>

Making broad accusations while offering few details, Shoemaker referred to no specific incident that might have triggered his resignation. Instead his compressed narrative summarized a set of accumulated grievances: inadequate materials distributed late to the public; partisan rather than "politically disinterested" facilitators; the prospect of a charter not generated by Chelsea residents themselves in a process "far too heavily influenced by the Receiver's office" and distant from "what was originally intended."<sup>298</sup> His letter revolves through a complete cycle of the tropes, characterizing the CPT's meetings as a conspiratorial charade to impose a charter on a disempowered Chelsea, a counterfeit process from which he must disengage.

His letter indeed had a powerful impact, both on the chair of the governance

---

<sup>297</sup> Letter from Robert Shoemaker to Marilyn Portnoy, dated April 22, 1994. Miller did not facilitate the CPT meetings, but served as facilitator at other public meetings.

<sup>298</sup> Naming no names, the sentence in which Shoemaker speculated – with the studied disclaimer that "I don't know" – about the receiver's intentions is ambiguous and diffuse, his generalized language permitting Shoemaker to gesture at the all the ways that CPT members appointed by the receiver might be working at the behest of the receiver, or in whatever ways any given reader might infer. It can be read a number of different ways. By referring to "the receiver's office," Shoemaker may have been commenting on the presence of three City Hall employees as voting members of the CPT, even though they often expressed contradictory opinions. Alternatively, Shoemaker may have been singling out McGoldrick alone, whose hand in drafting the charter language became increasingly (and always unapologetically) visible.

Sub-Committee and on the discourse of charter opposition. Couching his resignation in terms of the CPT's failure as an exercise in democratic deliberation, the letter also established a rhetorical template of disillusionment and betrayal – a template that would resurface many times throughout the referendum campaign, as other charter opponents described their own disappointed hopes in what they now called the false promises of renewed democracy within the receivership framework.

Shoemaker elaborated on this loss-of-innocence theme in his anti-charter manifesto published just before the June referendum in the *Chelsea Record*. The *Record* strongly endorsed the charter but gave the opposition the top of the newspaper's op-ed section to make its argument; Spence's column urging Chelsea voters to support the charter was sat directly below Shoemaker's on the same page.<sup>299</sup> Shoemaker used the space to present a chronicle in damning detail: his good-faith efforts to participate in what he came to regard as a tainted process, his growing recognition of what could only be seen as a conspiracy to keep Chelsea citizens in thrall to a fraudulent process. Arguing that the resulting document failed to represent either their input or their true interests, he summoned Chelsea voters to take a principled position of resistance to the charter, rather than allowing themselves to be disempowered by this illegitimate exercise.

Appearing four days before voting day, Shoemaker's June 17 op-ed piece opened with what he characterized, in somewhat sarcastic retrospect, as his naïve anticipation:

---

<sup>299</sup> Both published under the banner headline "Point, Counterpoint on the Charter," Spence's essay was entitled "New Charter Will Benefit the Ordinary People." The newspaper's own editorial endorsement was clearly labeled "Vote 'Yes' on the Charter" (June 17, 1994, p. 8).

When I first heard about it, it sounded so good. The experts were coming to Chelsea to help us write our charter. I was very excited. They were going to generate a volcano of public involvement in a unique process. A process of public education and opinion surveys. I looked forward to being a part of it.<sup>300</sup>

Maintaining that Spence had promised Chelsea a menu of choices for its future governance (a verbal public commitment to which he said all the "holdover aldermen" could testify), Shoemaker continued, "That was out now." Instead, he had allowed himself to be assured that the consensus process and the referendum would provide the opportunity for both open debate and democratic selection, assurances that came from former alderman Dom Pegnato, who had become one of the draft charter's champions on the CPT and who "had explained how much more inclusive this would be" than the menu option would have been. To assuage his last hesitation, a concern "that public meetings would not draw attendance in winter" because of the cold and unpredictable weather, "[t]he experts said they could do it. I wanted to believe it, so I did believe it." In his own credulousness, Shoemaker embodied the earnest good will of other Chelsea citizens.

Shoemaker then introduced the skeptical eye: "Fortunately, I am old enough to know that when we trust, it should never be blind trust. So I probed a little, and I watched, looked and listened a lot." With a suggestive gesture toward a vast array of untold stories, he added, "I could write a book about what I saw, but I am going to stick with the obvious." And then the punch line: "Anyone who says that we dug in and drew out the wishes of the Chelsea voters...is kidding himself." He recapitulated the argument that the sentiments of local

---

<sup>300</sup> "Vote 'No' and We Will Do It Right This Time," *Chelsea Record*, June 17, 1994, p. 8.

residents never had been solicited comprehensively, with no door-to-door canvassing, no telephone polls, and the one survey by mail ("you read it correctly, just ONE") with a 7-percent response rate. The questionnaire itself was "questionable" and could not have stood "the test of a professional survey... [because it was] wide open to error and bias." In addition, there were inadequate records of the poorly-attended public meetings where the draft charter had been presented and put to straw votes, even though non-residents participated and the same diehard meeting-goers "were counted over and over again," while the consultants collected fees for holding these inconclusive exercises. With such a weak effort at genuine community input and with such thin results, Shoemaker argued, the referendum had become an exercise in marketing rather than representative democracy: "How can we possibly say this proposed charter represents that the Chelsea voters want? The vote on June 21st is only going to show whether we [sic] can get them to accept it."

As editorialist (and elected official), Shoemaker was careful not to appear to insult the CPT's citizen members, even though he described the overall process as a sham. "Some good people worked hard on that Charter Preparation Team, but I call it a group 'under the influence,' " he wrote, distinguishing between the "true believers amongst the preparation team [who] drank spiked tea and didn't even know it," guilty only of trusting the untrustworthy, and "[o]thers [who] knew where they were supposed to go and that's right where they brought it." He presented himself as a recovering member of the first category, a *bona-fide* participant whose credulity had been exploited and who lost his faith after a painful but necessary confrontation with the reality of the charter process: "I was one of three individuals who

became disillusioned and got out," a decision taken on principle because of his disappointed hopes for truly democratic deliberations.

To substantiate his challenge to the CPT's claims of representativeness, Shoemaker then performed a political and demographic analysis of its membership, annotating their hometowns (there being one global criterion: inside or outside of Chelsea), their professions and professional associations, and their relationships to Spence and to other local centers of power. Most of these thumbnail descriptions were lightly-veiled categorical attacks, technically preserving the anonymity of the individual members but often transparent or easily identified.<sup>301</sup>

Then, with an italicized rhetorical flourish, Shoemaker turned to the content of the final charter itself and the features to which he objected the most:

*Juggling the wards, diluting the representative strength of the boards with non-*

---

<sup>301</sup> By Shoemaker's count, one CPT member served as a strategic adjunct to the "paid experts," someone who "had a knowledge of local government that kept them consistently four paces ahead of the group" – a reference that might apply either to chief of staff McGoldrick or to former alderman Pegnato. McGoldrick was undoubtedly the "one who lives in Somerville and is employed by the receiver," and because of both facts, presumably the power behind the appointment of the CPT member and "Chelsea citizen [who] is, coincidentally, Somerville's City Solicitor" – easily identified as Joan Langsam. He identified six other members as employees of human-services organizations, which "have enjoyed a boom in Chelsea under the Receiver," and another six CPT members also had been appointed to other boards or committees either by the receiver or by Boston University. These organizations another frequent target of conservative white ethnic wing of Chelsea electorate and elected officials. After re-confirming the well-known fact that three members were directly employed by City Hall, Shoemaker also marked others "[f]our to five of your elected officials[, at] least three of [whom] have strong records of supporting the receiver." His uncertainty about the actual number of elected officials may reflect the transition after Shoemaker's own resignation, which left two current alderman, one current School Committee member, and former alderman Pegnato; alternatively, it might have been an awkward way to describe Pegnato's status as former alderman. In either case, it is not clear which of the "[a]t least three of them" were elected officials with "strong records of supporting the receiver," and which might be the pol on the fence with the wobbly history of pro-receiver sentiment.



residents, omitting the words "United States" citizen from voter qualifications, and securing the non-resident employees in city hall [sic] and with a provision that will probably force Harry German off the Conservation Commission is just too much.<sup>302</sup>

Shoemaker's language – "juggling," "diluting," "omitting" – was shot through with intentionality, linguistic echoes of his argument that the proper functioning and distribution of power was being disrupted and manipulated, eroding the political representation of existing Chelsea residents while non-citizens gained new political rights, a demagogic touch. By not specifying how the charter would act to "secur[e] the non-resident employees" in city government, his vagueness itself is inflammatory. His dig at the "provision that will probably force" gadfly Harry German from any effective role in defense of the Chelsea waterfront personalized his charge that the charter would undermine the political participation of citizen-activists as well as the representation of citizens Shoemaker considered legitimate.

His next target was Podziba's herself, playing the mediator's own signature phrase back to her in order to challenge her legitimacy:

The Receiver's hired expert, Susan Podziba, often asked [the CPT], "Can you live with it?" The answer is "No!", Susan [sic]. Of course she doesn't have to live with it. A few hours a week in Chelsea, and she's back to the suburbs.<sup>303</sup>

In a reverse twist on the exile trope, he characterized her as escaping the consequences of the charter's provisions, engaging in didactic policy-making in someone else's community, and then going home to an environment insulated from Chelsea's stresses by physical and social distance – a charge

---

<sup>302</sup> Italics as in the original.

<sup>303</sup> Punctuation as in the original.

Portnoy leveled directly at Podziba at the June 9 governance sub-committee meeting, when she asked rhetorically: " 'Can you live with it?' Then you come live in Chelsea with it."<sup>304</sup>

Again turning the rhetorical tables, Shoemaker cited several other features that made the charter, rather than its opponents, "extreme:" that the power of the city manager was not "balanced" by countervailing power in the city council or the appointed boards, and that the city manager would control not only daily operations in City Hall "but...the direction and development, present and future," posing the rhetorical question, "If he or she ignores the Chelsea people and caters to the state, the MWRA or the Port Authority, [then] where will we be?" In addition, instead of providing a measure of stability, the requirement that the city manager only could be removed by a "super-majority" of city councilors really meant that a "super-minority" – of just five of the 11 councilors – could protect the city manager indefinitely. In any event, "what will it matter to him? His [or her] future will be insured with friends in other agencies of government. Chelsea will be left with airport parking or contaminated fill or the hospital waste[-]disposal industry."<sup>305</sup>

In the last paragraph, Shoemaker worked hard to close the deal with the reader, suggesting that the June 30 deadline was artificially imposed to create a sense of urgency and offered the Vote No group's final pitch:

---

<sup>304</sup> Author's notes.

<sup>305</sup> Shoemaker is referring to Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA), a quasi-public agency created under court pressure in 1986 to overhaul regional sewage disposal in Boston Harbor, and a discarded proposal to use a section of Chelsea's industrial waterfront as a transfer station for sludge from the harbor clean-up, as well as the controversial Bio-Med facility.

We don't want to rush into an incomplete product. It's too important. The people of Chelsea are not afraid of a new form of government. They just don't want to give their rights away. Vote "No" and let's do it right this time.

Shoemaker's column collected all the Vote No committee's anti-charter arguments in one place and combined them in a narrative that cycled through the three tropes: coming to an awakening about the conspiratorial ways in which Chelsea citizens were being disenfranchised from their future, and rallying them to oppose the illegitimate document that otherwise would seal their undemocratic fate. The conspiracy took many forms: the group "under the influence" of the mediator and the receiver, either in on the conspiracy or unwittingly drinking "spiked tea"; the questionnaire selectively distributed, its results the manufactured evidence of distorted community sentiment; the careerist city manager not even fully vested in Chelsea's stability and success but in keeping a "super-minority" of city councilors satisfied, then moving on through the professional network of newfound "friends in other agencies." Shoemaker's own language was to demonstrate the level of manipulation he saw at work in the process. In all this, two dangers lurked: the citizens of Chelsea "giv[ing] their rights away" while non-citizens mysteriously gain new rights and new jobs in Chelsea City Hall.

After his extravagant language about manipulation and disenfranchisement, his calls for resistance seem relatively mild and measured: not to "rush into an incomplete product," but instead to vote against the charter in order to take the city through a legitimate charter-development process, and to "do it right this time."

*Portnoy's Complaint:  
"It's a Done Deal"*

When Shoemaker submitted his CPT resignation letter to "Madam Alderman" Portnoy, he must have known that his most immediate audience would infer a great deal from his resignation letter, and would be inflamed by any suggestion that the charter-drafting process had turned from "an exciting opportunity to see Chelsea shape it's [sic] own future" to "a situation where a charter may be imposed upon the citizens of Chelsea, before it is voted upon." Impatient and irascible, fiercely loyal to her hometown and resentful of the indignities of receivership, Portnoy herself had been recruited for the CPT but refused, saying that she knew she would be obstructionist.<sup>306</sup> It was an honest self-assessment, but it also reserved the right of florid non-cooperation and dramatic expressions of dissent from a position of hard and fast resistance, her "theory of responsibility" so firmly established that she would entertain few attempts to dislodge it.

Portnoy's language was as colorful as her blond beehive, and her skepticism was frequently expressed through one of her favorite sayings: "If you assume, you make an ass out of you and me," a pun based on the spelling of the word "assume:" "ass" followed by "u" and "me." Quick to judge and quicker to anger, she did not always follow her own motto. Her voice rose as she finished reading Shoemaker's letter and began her own commentary on the charter-drafting process: "In my opinion, it's not working."<sup>307</sup> Itemizing her

---

<sup>306</sup> June 9, 1994 Board of Aldermen's Governance Sub-Committee meeting, author's notes.

<sup>307</sup> April 26, 1994 Board of Alderman meeting, notes transcribed from Chelsea Cable Television videotape of the proceedings.

own list of evidence that, in her eyes, discredited the process, she first drew attention to what she judged poor handling of the survey, which had been mailed to every Chelsea resident on the current voting list and whose results had been cited in support of key policy choices to be reflected in the charter:

I've been a voter in this city since the day I registered, never missed [an election]. I never received a questionnaire or a survey. Neither did my children. There are many people who didn't receive [one]. They [the charter team] received approximately 700 answers – and that is what they're basing the charter on. We have almost 11,000 voters, 10,000 voters – that's not even 10 percent of the voters. And they're gonna tell me what good for me in a *charter*? Well, I absolutely – I've said it before, I'll say it again: it's a done deal.

For Portnoy, the apparent gaps in survey distribution had triggered two if/then logical chains of narrative deduction. First, if the questionnaire had been distributed to everyone on the city's active-voter list, then what would account for her failure – and the failure of her network of family, friends, and constituents – to have received it? The distribution gap led to the second if/then pair: if the survey had not reached a significant swath of registered voters and the return rate was so light, then how could the survey be considered representative? How could mediator Podziba and receiver Spence hail the survey's results as a reliable expression of the city's consensus on its future governance?

Suspicious of conspiracy created new links in the narrative chain. To Portnoy, the only logical answer was that the survey must have offered support to the outcome Podziba had been mandated to deliver to Spence – a conclusion that reflexively suggested to her that the surveys addressed Portnoy and her allies might have been intercepted or never sent out at all, in order to avoid recording their contrary opinions. Out of Portnoy's original position that the

survey had been an inadequate tool for gauging community sentiment grew another, larger deduction: that the survey had had a merely theatrical role in a charter-drafting process choreographed to produce a charter whose predetermined terms were not to be challenged.

The next grievance on her list was that despite her requests for a copy of the working draft for her committee to review, nothing had been delivered, further nursing a suspicion that the information was being withheld from a known critic in order to protect a known outcome that was not to be threatened by the actual preferences of Chelsea residents themselves:

I can't talk about the charter with the Ordinance and Governance [Committee] because I have nothing to go on, just a bunch of hearsay. I don't want to go [on] hearsay, but I'm gonna say, I said it once, and I'm gonna say it again, and the aldermen that were with me in the past two years, three years, know what I say is the truth: we were promised we would be given an opportunity to pick the kind of government *we* wanted, *not* what the receiver wants or what the previous receiver wanted, what the citizens of Chelsea wanted, and we have not been afforded that. And this charter is absolutely the biggest disgrace, and if we accept it, then shame on us, because we're committing ourselves to the biggest downfall for the city of Chelsea...

The passing reference to "what the previous receiver wanted" foreshadowed the dramatic presentation of what Portnoy took to be an incontrovertible piece of evidence. Later in the meeting, Portnoy brought to the committee's attention a document that had been delivered to her mailbox at home the day before the meeting. Dated December 1, 1992, it was a previous proposed charter for Chelsea, and it demonstrated to her that there indeed was a full-fledged charter already on paper. Her voice rising again, she declaimed:

So if you tell me it's not a done deal, folks, then you're living in la-la land, not

me. Because I'm far from dumb – I may not be a Rhodes scholar, but like I told them up at the Charter Preparation Team, [I'm] not a Pinocchio either, not a wooden dummy. And I can read and I can comprehend...everything in this little package of thirty-odd pages. Almost word for word as to what the Charter Preparation Team is working on today.<sup>308</sup>

The document left in her mailbox – from a source she would not disclose – actually was not new to the Board of Aldermen: Carlin had distributed the template to the governance committee for its review, if not its consent.<sup>309</sup>

That language had been scrapped when Spence took over the receiver's office and announced that a new charter-drafting exercise would begin. Whatever the 1992 document's status, it would be a distortion to assert "word[-]for[-]word" similarities to the draft charter the CPT had underway. Even Portnoy acknowledged the striking exception that the 1992 document described a City Council composed of seven citywide members, while the then-current CPT draft set the membership at 13 with both district and at-large representation, a distinction she dismissed with a comment, "Six people got lost somewhere in the world"; the document's glaring silence on the School Committee went without comment. But she declared the unshakable conviction that the document was material proof of a foregone conclusion, maintaining, "I've said it from day one, right from the beginning...You've already got the charter written, folks." The narrative had been re-cast in light of what appeared to be new evidence – or old evidence casting a different light on a new situation.

Like Shoemaker, Portnoy also challenged the active role of Spence's staff in

---

<sup>308</sup> The "Rhodes scholar" comment refers to Chelsea state senator Birmingham, who was one.

<sup>309</sup> Former alderman and CPT member Dom Pegnato was chair of the aldemanic governance Subcommittee at the time Carlin's charter was distributed, and he confirmed that the document Portnoy received was the old document which never had been adopted or acted on officially. Questions about whether she had forgotten about encountering it previously or whether a canny *agent provocateur* set her up for a predictable public explosion lingered.

the CPT. Invoking her trademark aphorism, she directed a more personalized attack at chief of staff McGoldrick: "I blame myself, because if you assume, you make an ass out of you and me, and I got made an ass of, because I thought Mr. McGoldrick was just sitting in. Who gives him the right to say what should be in the Chelsea charter?" That McGoldrick worked for Spence, and that he was a resident and registered voter in a city other than Chelsea, were clear signs to Portnoy that Chelsea's own decision-making power was being diluted and displaced from local residents. And worse, the Chelsea residents on the CPT did not even seem to realize it:

I'm not offending anyone, because in all honesty, everybody from Chelsea who has served on the charter committee has...been absolutely honest in their dealings, and they have tried very hard. They have integrity, they are decent people, but they are being led down the garden path. But I refuse to allow myself [to be led there].

Portnoy then returned to the issue of survey distribution and linked it to the sensitive subject of Chelsea citizenship, remarking,

Someone who hasn't lived in the city for three years, hasn't voted in three years, lives in Puerto Rico today – they got a survey. ...[W]ell, then, hell – is someone voting under [that former resident's] name? Is that what I'm to assume? I hope they have everything just right, "politically correct"...

With these arch comments, Portnoy moved the focus of legitimacy onto the city's Latino population. Without offering any additional substantiation, she stirred up a set of provocative questions: how had a resident of Puerto Rico who had not voted in three years gotten a survey based on the active voting list, especially when her own family and associates had not? Had there been any improprieties in the survey returns, with questionnaires being mailed



back by current residents who were not registered voters at that (or any other) Chelsea address?

The caustic "politically correct" line was another dig at the Latino community, suggesting official hyper-vigilance about the rights of a favored minority, as opposed to the presumption of ballot fraud on the part of white Chelsea residents, with scrutiny of their voting practices. But Portnoy particularly resented the broad-brush charge that all white Chelsea politicians were corrupt and that the electoral habits of the entire white Chelsea voting public were susceptible to irregularities, and her comment's sharper edge was directed at the receiver's office and the mediator, who were the ones to hold responsible for the preparation of voter lists for the survey's mailing. She smelled condescension in the charter-drafting process: "[T]hey didn't have to take that charter and make us [sound] like we were stupid and corrupt and the only way we can exist in this city is with their charter." Meanwhile, the possibility that the Latino response to the mail-in survey might have been amplified by genuine irregularities, without verification of names, addresses, or eligibility, fed her larger suspicion that the Latino vote was being cultivated and even pandered to by the charter's authors as well as its backers.

It would be a mistake to underestimate Portnoy or her capacity for pragmatism. During the school-siting controversy, for example, her defensive instincts did not cloud her priorities. After objections to an initial set of proposed locations, Spence had opened the siting decisions to public consultation, where objections about noise and traffic were constantly at risk of escalating into a larger dispute: over whether neighborhood resistance to proposed sites was actually racial in nature, given the high enrollment of

Latino (and Asian) students in the Chelsea system and the white middle-class areas where the objections arose. At one heated public meeting, some residents opposed plans for the enormous new elementary-school complex that would obliterate a historic park. When she spoke, Portnoy's biting language told her constituents that she shared their principled objections to what she called "sites chosen by 'the chosen.'" <sup>310</sup> But she also was willing to spend some of her political capital on an unpopular position in front of a restive audience:

You're here because you don't want this school. This city is declining in population because we don't have the proper tools to work with, safety-wise [or] school-wise...Make up your minds now: do you want every other house in Chelsea with a for-sale sign? Or do you want to give [the city's public elementary-school students] the right thing? In my establishment the other day, I told [assistant receiver for economic development] Carole Gladstone and [project manager] Linda Snyder that neither one of those schools was in the right place, but you gotta put them somewhere.

Turning up the volume in her rapid-fire delivery, she proposed her own solution, including a spontaneous reference to a high school with excess capacity in a neighboring city: "Move the [high-school] kids to Revere, move the Williams [junior-high] school kids to Chelsea High School, tear down the Williams School, and build the goddamn [elementary] school" on the Williams site. Then she climbed over the chairs at the front of the room and walked out, digging through the pocket of her coat for a cigarette, still mumbling impatient asides.

As for the mediator, Portnoy had an alternate route to procuring a more

---

<sup>310</sup> Author's notes, Board of Aldermen's conference held at the Chelsea Public Library for public input on siting a new elementary school in Merritt Park, February 28, 1994.

accurate representation of Chelsea opinion:

...[W]hen this whole process was starting, Susan Podziba came to me, [saying she regarded me] as a "respected observer, because I hear you tell the truth, tell me how you think we should go about it." I said, "This is not a ordinary city. We're unique in one thing: we're very political-minded, but in order to get people involved, you gotta walk, you gotta knock, and you gotta talk." You can't have these little coffee klatches and think that you'll bring out people. It was a bad winter [*i.e.*, the weather deterred people from public meetings], but it [*i.e.*, the charter process] was not handled right. I went to [ward alderman] Juan Vega's Ward 1 meeting: there were three people from the ward. After you got through taking out the politicians, there were three people from the ward.<sup>311</sup>

The mediator might protest that the elaborate charter methodology, as outlined on her ubiquitous chart, indeed had multiple vehicles for soliciting input on the draft charter as it evolved. But in her closing statement, Portnoy invoked Shoemaker's resignation, the disaffection of unnamed others, and her own experience of a ward meeting with negligible turn-out, linking them all to her demand for a menu as the only way to re-open a process closed to direct communication to and from Chelsea residents:

I have the deepest respect for people who committed to the Charter Preparation Team. They have worked very hard, and it's too bad they're drifting off – and why are they drifting off? I hate to say it: they've seen the light. They don't like the way the process that is going on...[Some people] refer to us as crooked politicians, the corrupt politicians. Who called us corrupt politicians? The receiver [*voice again rising*], the receiver, and why did he call us corrupt politicians? Because he wants to prove that we're all not good enough to serve in this city, because we're corrupt. Well, I've got news for you. I thought my dear friend, God rest his soul, [former Chelsea mayor and publisher of the *Chelsea Record*] Andrew Quigley, was the best politician that I have ever met

---

<sup>311</sup> She immediately added, "No disrespect to Juan, because he turned around and flyer'd the neighborhood." Portnoy owned a corner store in Vega's ward, Chelsea's poorest (also with the highest concentration of Latino residents), and with cigarette perpetually in hand, she presided over it as if it was both her kitchen and her courtroom, gathering local intelligence and admonishing the local youth in the same way that she sometimes imposed order on her unruly aldermanic colleagues in public session, like a bear cuffing her cubs.

in my life. But I gotta tell you something, pals, Harry Spence gets the Oscar for that: he's the best politician. He plays people against people, and he has created this menace that we have...People don't want [the charter] being rammed down their throats. They want a menu because that's what was promised by the highest politician in the city, Harry Spence. Three different times I asked him, and aldermen, you were there, three different times he guaranteed. You know what? I'm not gonna accept that charter. You know why? I'll tell you why...[S]marten up, everybody, it was a done deal two years ago.

Already aggrieved by the charge of universal corruption in Chelsea, Portnoy reversed the images: Spence as the manipulative pol disguised by the protective cover of an above-the-fray receiver and herself as the guardian of citizens' rights, unfooled. Shoemaker's resignation – "drifting off" the CPT – was an indicator to her that at least one participant had "seen the light," or at least seen through Spence's disguise. The Carlin-era charter mysteriously left in her mailbox, whatever its precise terms, was proof enough to her of a shadow process somewhere away from public view, and as far as she was concerned, the document under discussion at the CPT was a dead letter: "Because I have to tell you something: you can take that charter you're preparing, and you can rip it up in little pieces..."

Her resistance had been formally declared. Portnoy moved from the conspiratorial tableaux sketched by Shoemaker to elaborations of her own series of nested scenarios: the survey and its distribution gap a part of a scripted exercise whose outcome already was known, a "done deal," the CPT's work no more than a theater piece to create a staged arrival at mock consensus. The draft Carlin charter, even if it had been abandoned in favor of a new proposal, gained new historical meaning as a precursor of another proposed charter that would materialize mysteriously for the CPT to rubber-stamp. In the face of such manipulation, and of the prospective

disenfranchisement of some Chelsea voters who are being "led down the garden path" while a charter is "rammed down their throats," her persistent calls for a "menu" become a cry for free choice. Who is engaging in the abuse of power in this series of embedded and mutually-reinforcing scenarios – the "corrupt" elected officials of Chelsea or the receiver? The only appropriate end to such a narrative about the illegitimate exercise of authority would be to disengage, protest the process, reject the product – and rip it up.

*Jordan's Dislocation Theory:*

*The Unfinished Business of Massachusetts Transportation Politics*

Donald Jordan remembers the epiphany: the defining moment when he first looked at the Chelsea aerial photograph, a birthday present from his wife, and recognized the full implications of the city's geography. Although he had lived in Boston and traveled in Europe, Chelsea remained his own political and psychic hub, and the couple had returned to his hometown in the mid-1980s, buying property in the waterfront district. Yet the bird's-eye view of his familiar territory suddenly revealed what he came to consider the defining logic of the receivership. Noticing as if for the first time the infrastructure that radiated out around it, Jordan saw Chelsea at the crossroads between regional transportation, spatial economics, and Massachusetts politics.

Less than two miles from New England's major international airport, connected by bridge both to downtown Boston and the regional highway network, Chelsea stood at the epicenter of a complex and vital transportation system, whose smooth operation was indispensable to the business community and whose control was a source of constant gamesmanship within the political community (particularly at the state level, where factions fought for policy and political dominance of the powerful quasi-public agencies). Jordan's birthday gift was not just a view of cherished rooftops and byways but a crash course in location theory, the branch of economics that quantifies the logic of location choice. What the map had revealed to his critical eye was a simple geo-political reason for the governor to have imposed receivership on his hometown: to force open the door of development on the city's waterfront, which previously had been blockaded

from airport-related activity.

To Jordan, it now was obvious: the governor needed Chelsea, and not because it represented a long-denied notch on his prosecutorial belt, but because he needed land. For a tiny, land-poor city toying with bankruptcy, Chelsea had a lot of assets hidden in plain sight. And from the moment he saw – he *saw* – the aerial photograph, Jordan was persuaded that receivership had nothing to do with federal investigations or poor accounting practices. Chelsea had been invaded for its great natural resource: acres of dirty, under-valued, under-utilized, soon-to-be-vacant industrial land along a dirty, under-valued, and largely ignored waterway. Massport needed Chelsea, and it needed control of Chelsea Creek. As far as Jordan was concerned, the governor had sent the receiver to claim them. Jim Carlin wasn't there just to balance the budget: he was there to take the waterfront away from Jordan's hometown. From Jordan's perspective, Carlin's unusual credentials – which included nothing in municipal government but previous active service in the state's transportation secretariat – might have persuaded a governor that he was just the man to claim Chelsea Creek for Massport: "He knew about Chelsea, and the role it would play after the third harbor tunnel" was completed, a view that fed Jordan's suspicions that Carlin was not just a political but a geopolitical hire.<sup>312</sup>

There were data that arguably made Jordan's "theory of responsibility" a plausible scenario. His reading of the map was apt. Although Chelsea's connections to the airport and to Boston – by drawbridge, by toll-bridge, or by

---

<sup>312</sup> Interview, December 6, 1994. All quotes from Donald Jordan in this section are from this interview unless otherwise noted.

truck route – were fragile and easily congested, land values at the mainland end of the new cross-harbor tunnel in South Boston were escalating rapidly, and the shores of Chelsea Creek were at a transitional tipping point for the departure of the tank farms, leaving dirty land available for new uses. Meanwhile, Logan needed space for its vehicle-intensive support services – parking lots, rent-a-car storage, and air-freight forwarders – beyond the limits of the industrial corridor along the airport's edge, a strip that the adjacent East Boston neighborhood had fought for 20 years to reclaim from *de-facto* Logan expansion.

To the conspiratorial eye, there were other clues. For someone who, as state transportation secretary, had promoted Logan Airport expansion, Carlin as receiver took a surprisingly – even suspiciously – aggressive stance toward Massport. His first day on the job, he declared characteristically combative but uncharacteristically populist intentions to "get big bucks out of Massport." Since "Chelsea is on the doorstep of the airport," he later told an interviewer, the agency was an obvious target: "Look, Chelsea's broke and Massport's loaded. It's not very hard...I'd ride that horse till its damn knees buckled."<sup>313</sup> Nonetheless, his hard-line approach seemed to reflect either some intervening conversion experience or some other tactical shift.

Logan wasn't the only institutional hook: Massport owned another controversial facility in Chelsea: the Mystic-Tobin Bridge, visible from almost anywhere in the city, the highly resonant symbol of political, economic, and

---

<sup>313</sup> In a less populist spirit, he added that "one of the things Chelsea had to deal with [with] the people over there is that Chelsea is not Palm Beach, Chelsea is not Sherborn [a well-off Boston suburb], to some degree, it has to take what it can get to get on its feet. Chelsea can't be picky and choosy about what they're going to accept and not accept." Interview, July 13, 1995.



social marginalization as well as a source of immediate quality-of-life impacts on traffic, noise, air pollution, lead-paint chips and litter. Even so, it also was an odd target for Carlin. During his previous stint in state transportation management, he seemed to have overlooked whatever outstanding debts Massport might have owed to the citizens of Chelsea, and the King administration had regarded all demands for community reparations as attempts at highway robbery.

But Carlin inaugurated his campaign for Massport's "big bucks" at his first public meeting in Chelsea in October 1991, when the new receiver told the crowd of 400 people, "There's no question Chelsea got a rotten deal on the bridge...Massport owes us big time. They owe us big time. I'm talking about \$4 million to \$6 million a year – none of this 300-grand-a-year stuff."<sup>314</sup> Two months later, he reiterated his claim before a very different audience in a speech to the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce's Executive Circle: "Massport and the legislature and the administration must resolve an ongoing payment to Chelsea for the damage the Tobin Bridge has done to the city of Chelsea for decades and will continue to do in the future. Massport must settle its debt with Chelsea."<sup>315</sup>

In the same Chamber of Commerce speech, Carlin articulated a arrangement that was hardly a one-way transaction to settle an outstanding financial and moral obligation. Instead, he publicly offered Massport control of five miles of the Chelsea waterfront for \$5 million a year:

---

<sup>314</sup> Brian McGrory, "Chelsea Receiver Wants \$4m-\$6m Yearly from State," *Boston Globe*, October 31, 1991, p. 37.

<sup>315</sup> Andrea Estes, "Chelsea Receiver Offers Property Deal to Massport," *Boston Herald*, December 18, 1991.

We are offering today to put all the waterfront and industrial zoning land on the east side of Chelsea under Massport control in terms of how it is used. Massport could have Avis and Hertz and their post office and their employee parking on this property. Massport would be the BRA of East Chelsea...and this control...by itself...is worth \$5,000,000 per year.<sup>316</sup>

No such trade-off had been an explicit part of the compensation he had ringingly demanded in October in the Chelsea High School auditorium. To the conspiratorial eye, it was a classic bait-and-switch: having effectively diverted the community's attention from airport-related development along Chelsea Creek by drawing attention to bridge-related historical injustices, Carlin was prepared to give the airport and its feeder industries privileged access to the land Logan needed on the Chelsea waterfront, and something close to outright control. In one deft gesture, Carlin had cast Massport simultaneously as an enemy and a resource: part rich (and detested) uncle, part business partner, part 800-pound gorilla.

By February 1992, the existing payment-in-lieu-of-taxes (PILOT) agreement had been amended in terms that were even more advantageous to Massport than the offer Carlin put forward at the Chamber.<sup>317</sup> Chelsea would get a

---

<sup>316</sup> James F. Carlin, "It's Sunday in Chelsea," text of prepared remarks for the Executives Club of the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce, December 17, 1991, p. 19, ellipses as in the original. Note that the money was to have been generated by doubling Tobin Bridge tolls – at no real net cost to Massport, but a fiscal burden instead to be carried by commuters and other drivers (including Chelsea residents).

<sup>317</sup> This was lightning speed by the standards of any public bureaucracy, but particularly in relation to the highly politicized PILOT agreement, which had been crafted with each of the municipalities with land inside Logan's boundaries, which after years of expansion into Boston Harbor included not only Boston but Chelsea and Winthrop. The re-negotiation of an existing agreement under normal circumstances (when the 10-year life of the agreement ran out) ordinarily took months, if not years of wrangling among lawyers, public officials, and community organizations. Massport had negotiated its most recent PILOT agreement with Chelsea in February 1996, and so was undertaking this process a full four years early.

lump sum of \$5 million plus an additional \$350,000 per year as "compensation for services" while Massport was "exploring several development initiatives in the City, particularly with regard to relocation of Airport employee parking in the City."<sup>318</sup> By Jordan's estimate, the gorilla had won, and for short money.

Now seeing his city from the predatory perspective of a circling hawk, Jordan assembled a logical string of key data points that pushed further and further back in Chelsea's fiscal and political history, cross two mutually hostile Democratic state administrations and into the first term of the first Republican holder of the governor's office since the 1960s. He dated the formal link he saw between inexorable airport expansion and inevitable receivership quite precisely: back to 1986, when a Chelsea air-freight company was denied a zoning permit to expand and a residents' association succeeded in getting a two-year moratorium on building permits anywhere on the city's industrial waterfront. Later that year, a change in the zoning code prohibited new parking garages, park-and-flies, and freight-forwarding anywhere in the city. Because of "the message it sent up to the State House," Jordan argued, that zoning shift had prompted a sustained effort "across both parties and two different governors" to gain access to the land along Chelsea Creek. The receivership, he said, was "a corporate takeover, for one reason...They took it not because Chelsea was corrupt, but because they wanted it for Logan Airport expansion." In a kind of vulgar Marxism alien to his own conservative orthodoxy, he saw class interests prevailing over the ideological differences,

---

<sup>318</sup> This sum approximated net the present value of 20 years' worth of up-front PILOT payments through the year 2012 – not new money or a genuine windfall but a lump-sum payment of something usually stretched over annual payments. In addition, Massport agreed to an annual \$350,000 contract for "services," a \$40,000 increase over the previous PILOT. *Chelsea/Massport Compact*, "Appendix A/Scope of Services," February 29, 1992.

partisan animosities, long knives, and longer memories that ordinarily marked the competition between (and, fiercely, within) the two political parties, in order to develop a consensus policy vision to capture Chelsea:

They used the ruse of corruption to take over the city. They knew in 1986 that the only way to change the ordinance, [given the] zoning [and] the attitude of people in Chelsea was to put this city into receivership. [The motivation for receivership] was predominantly zoning, and to dissolve all boards and commissions. If Chelsea were truly bankrupt, it should have been court-ordered: [an order to] retain the government and sell off the assets. They wanted it to fall the way it did because they control the assets.

Jordan was convinced that the state's 1986 \$5-million Chelsea bail-out was the first calculated step:

Sure, I'm assuming a lot. [But] it took two national accounting firms a year to analyze the city's books, [while] it took DOR [the state Department of Revenue] one week to say [it was] \$1.5 million in the red in 1986? Why did Chelsea need a \$5-million bailout if it was only \$1.5 million in the hole? Why did the state allow unbalanced budgets and pay raises for a city in financial trouble? Because that \$5 million was used as bait to get the city into receivership. They knew no mayor would go against [getting that money], and that no union, the firefighters, the police, the teachers would [reject it] either. It was a no-interest loan, so who cared? [The state] knew [Chelsea] wouldn't leave \$5 million alone, and it was a way to get the city into receivership.

That the \$5-million state loan anticipated a \$3.5-million deficit the following year did not seem to enter into Jordan's scenario-building, nor the recollection that the Finance Control Board – imposed on Chelsea as a condition of that state aid – had had no power to override the city's budgetary choices, only to reject its overall budget for the following fiscal year. To Jordan, the state had undertaken a calculated strategy of fiscal entrapment across two eras of party control, with the FCB as the public-sector equivalent

of a loan-shark or a bookmaker preying on the weaknesses of a gambling addict, all in order to secure Chelsea's land assets for airport-related uses.

Jordan saw confirmation of his hypothesis all around him. Four months into the receivership, Carlin had elevated Chelsea's director of Community Development and Planning Robert Luongo to serve as "zoning czar," with the near-unilateral powers to change zoning and grant variances, as delegated to the receiver in the 1991 legislation. Through Luongo, he imposed an "Airport Related Overlay District" (AROD) on a 14-acre landlocked parcel known as the Industrial Triangle; a state highway separated the Triangle and the waterfront.<sup>319</sup> Contrary to Jordan's theory, however, most of the controversial airport-related car-storage lots were not within the confines of the AROD, but outside its porous boundaries and on the waterfront itself. The first public signal of airport-related business taking interest Chelsea's new policies was an April 1992 application for a demolition permit needed to convert a former paint-factory site into a car-rental lot.<sup>320</sup>

Then came the Massport proposal to build a 2000-car garage at a prominent corner adjacent to the Chelsea Street Bridge, at the edge of a residential area where zoning regulations prohibited commercial parking – and a month later, the city's proposed new zoning amendment to allow parking in almost

---

<sup>319</sup> Zoning precedents in Boston's "overlay districts" were pioneered by the Boston Redevelopment Authority during the mid-1980s; see Riesman, *Rules of the Game: Rezoning Boston, 1984-89* (unpublished masters thesis), Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Department of Urban Studies and Planning, 1990.

<sup>320</sup> Luongo reviewed the application and extracted an agreement from the company to register its cars in city, creating new source of excise tax, and the Planning Board approved the permit with the *caveat* that both the permit and the lease had a ten-year life-span, as well as adding a requirement for visual screening.

all zoning districts citywide.<sup>321</sup> Luongo's office developed a parking plan for the waterfront area and its immediate backland, and the "czar" approved another 770-car lot early in 1993, prompting alderman Portnoy to declare bitterly, "We have become an annex to Logan Airport."<sup>322</sup> In midsummer, an economic-development consultant started what Spence called a "new look" at the Chelsea waterfront and regulatory environment, particularly at loosening its restrictive classification as a "designated port area" – preparation, in Jordan's eyes, for retro-fitting the shoreline for airport-related uses.<sup>323</sup> Toward the end of the year, Northeast Petroleum announced that it was decommissioning its tanks and working out a lease for off-airport parking on the site.<sup>324</sup> By 1994, close to 4000 airport-related parking spaces were concentrated at the foot of the Chelsea Street Bridge.

Jordan was not alone in thinking that the Massport garage deal epitomized deal-making of the most traditional kind. Chelsea Planning Commission member Richard Morrison said that it reminded him too of the "old politics" of "spot-zoning," where zoning designations were changed to facilitate a plan already formulated, rather than adhering to the planning principle that land-

---

<sup>321</sup> The only exceptions were "R1" single-family home districts and the former Chelsea Naval Hospital site (now the Admirals Hill condominium development and waterfront park), the proposed Massport garage being in a more densely developed, although still residential, "R2" district.

<sup>322</sup> Bill Conlon, "Marginal St. Parking Plan Upset Officials, Residents," *Chelsea Record*, January 20, 1993, p. 1.

<sup>323</sup> By July, the Massport garage was underway, and Lieutenant Governor Paul Cellucci had presented a \$25,000 from the Massachusetts Land Bank to study the 14-acre AROD. In June 1993, the consulting firm Mt. Auburn Associates had produced *The Chelsea Initiative: An Economic Development Strategy for the City of Chelsea*, with recommendations that included strategic development of airport-related services and jobs.

<sup>324</sup> This industrial transition set up the controversy over permits which later led Chelsea activist Harry German to give up his seat on the new Chelsea City Council in favor of his seat on the Chelsea Conservation Commission and his efforts to protect Chelsea Creek from airport-related development.

use decisions precede the formation of zoning regulations. When "[t]he zoning change is wired to a specific site," Morrison noted, the "appearance of impropriety" is strong.<sup>325</sup> To Jordan, the Massport garage deal had all the markings of political favoritism for which "the old Chelsea" had been so roundly condemned: it was a no-bid project brokered by a former Massport board member (as well as an attorney who later would become a Massport board chair) on behalf of a development partnership that included the son of former Boston mayor Kevin White.

The question of whose circles of friends and associates were legitimate networks of experienced public officials and city-builders and whose were unsavory alliances turning a profit with public funds was a running theme throughout the receivership era. Because of the charges of corruption lodged against the "old Chelsea," Jordan's resentment about the gamesmanship displayed by the "new Chelsea" directly linked back to the charter battle. To him it was part of a larger subterfuge, bolstered by character assassination: Spence had characterized the Vote No camp as "naysayers, obstacles, we're the 'old Chelsea,' " and had instigated "a campaign to paint us [*i.e.*, charter opponents] racist" in order to delegitimize their legitimate opposition. Instead, he argued,

What we want is honesty here, all I want is the truth told. They took our rights away, painted us with a broad brush [of across-the-board corruption] and that wasn't the reason why they came in here – they've got to answer to that. Democracy wasn't 'broke' here, it worked here. If that's what people wanted. And if it didn't survive, then Chelsea should have been annexed to another city. The only way to cure [that problem] is with more democracy, not less. They took it [*i.e.*, the city] not because Chelsea was corrupt but because they wanted it for Logan Airport expansion.

---

<sup>325</sup> Bill Conlon, "Residents Question New Garage Zoning," *Chelsea Record*, July 24, 1992.

To Jordan, the charges of wholesale corruption in Chelsea were merely a diversion, the magician's way of taking the audience's eye off the artifice.

Jordan also insisted that he was not against the charter itself so much as how it had been composed, maintaining that the mediator had controlled meetings by (in a sarcastic reference to negotiation jargon) "revisiting" issues and that "the Chelsea people involved were manipulated" by these and other tricks of the mediation trade. Because of Spence's interference, he charged, casting a ballot in favor of the proposed document was "not a vote for the charter but a vote for receivership. We were leading in the polls until Spence started getting involved...[He was] never supposed to be making phone calls [and] putting together leaflets." Jordan charged that for Spence to have mobilized those resources to promote the charter was "illegal," and called Spence "a control freak [who] knew he would lose control if he gave [the process] free rein."<sup>326</sup> To compensate for the interference in Chelsea's legitimate self-determination, Jordan advocated a return to the city's nineteenth-century past, to revert to a form of government left behind in 1857:

an open meeting with town-meeting members, the most democratic [model]...  
Power should lie with the people and not with the bureaucracy...Imagine  
having a town meeting and having people decide [the direction of the city].  
How many people would want anything to do with Massport in this  
community?

For Jordan, the issue was clear: the charter had been designed not to restore

---

<sup>326</sup> For a sitting mayor to advocate for one side or the other from City Hall with public employees using public resources would have been in violation of state and federal conflict-of-interest statutes – under normal electoral conditions, which these were not.



democratic rule in Chelsea but to dispossess its citizens, to overcome by fundamentally dishonest means the city's documented opposition to airport-related expansion on Chelsea Creek, and it was a citizen's duty to oppose the institutionalization of such flagrant disregard.

Jordan's epiphanic reading of the Chelsea map had tuned into a long-standing political nexus in Massachusetts politics, in which Chelsea was not only a geographical crossroads for major infrastructure but a target of institutional forces would stop at nothing to gain full control of those facilities, particularly the city's industrial waterfront. From that insight, Jordan extrapolated a monolithic state engaged in a full-scale ground war: first using public funds as bait and then, through the "ruse of corruption," seizing the city to "control the assets" that Chelsea had refused to give up in previous zoning and permitting disputes. He envisioned a centralized command, coordinating this near-military campaign through a series of contentious and disruptive changes of state administrations, requiring a high level of institutional coherency not ordinarily associated with Massachusetts state government. However, based on the evidence, Jordan stood his ground.

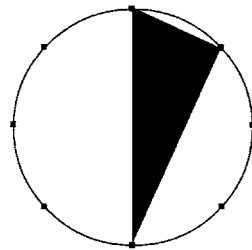
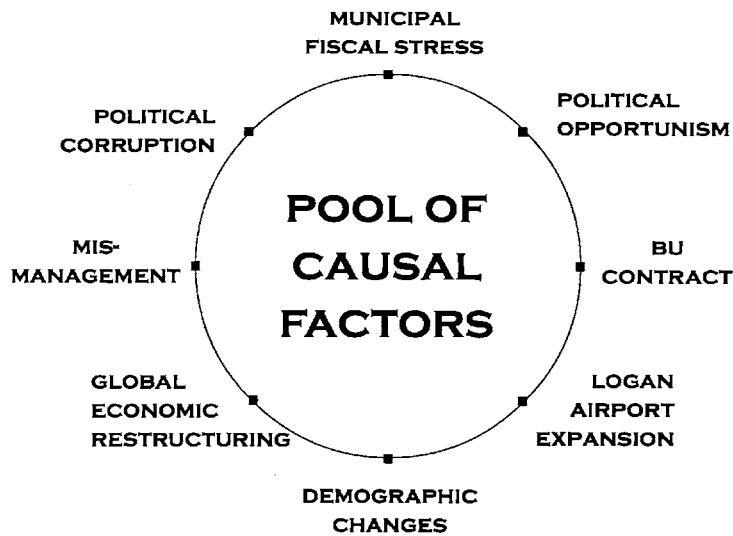
*Conclusion:*

*The Voices of Vote No*

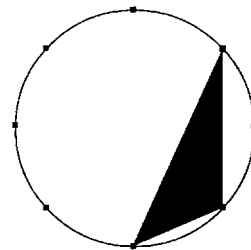
Portnoy and Jordan both identified demographic change and political opportunism as paramount causal factors in the city's crisis, sharing two other three factors in their causality maps (see Fig. 6.2). Thus they had one axis in common on their maps, between demographic change and political opportunism – putting the receiver in the latter category along with other elected officials and state agencies. But they chose different variables



## THEORIES OF RESPONSIBILITY: PORTNOY & JORDAN



**PORTNOY**



**JORDAN**

**Fig. 6.2** – Portnoy and Jordan both identified demographic change and political opportunism as causal factors in precipitating the city’s crisis, sharing one axis on their maps. But Jordan saw the state’s intervention as part of a long-term plan to make Chelsea an industrial adjunct of nearby Logan International Airport, while Portnoy recognized that disinvestment in the public schools had fed the city’s downward spiral, and was willing to take an unpopular stand to do “the right thing” for the city’s students, in part to stanch the continuing net outflow of population.



with which to complete their scenarios. Jordan was committed to his vision of the state's intervention as part of a long-term plan to make Chelsea an industrial adjunct of the airport. Portnoy, however, recognized that disinvestment in public facilities such as the public schools had fed the city's downward spiral, and was willing to do "the right thing" for the city's students, in part to stanch the continuing net outflow of population.

In the following section, another anti-charter voice speaks, but from the other side of a political and cultural divide, with a mirror-image reading of the conspiratorial underpinnings of the receivership, some insight into her antagonists' sense of exile, and a clear oppositional mission.

**VOICE OF A DIFFERENT RESISTANCE:  
MARTA ROSA & THE LATINO DIVIDE**

A formidable presence both personally and politically, Latina activist and School Committee member Marta Rosa had a very different entry into receivership from the aldermen who led the Vote No anti-charter campaign. Because of the Latino community's experience with the BU contract, the state's massive intervention into the city's affairs was neither shocking or surprising: no shock, because it was a familiar experience, and no surprise, because the community's widened political networks at the Massachusetts State House provided advance warning. Paradoxically, as president of an organization founded to be "the voice of people who had no voice," Rosa became the sole Chelsea citizen representative on the governor's Ad Hoc Committee.<sup>327</sup>

From a community-organizing perspective, however, the nature of the game was essentially unchanged with the arrival of the receiver: Rosa and Chelsea's Commission on Hispanic Affairs continued pursuing their objectives of empowerment and enfranchisement of the city's Latinos, pushing the receivers just as they had pushed the mayors, the city's other elected officials, and BU. Even though the pre-existing political culture had been disrupted, Rosa declared herself a skeptic from the outset of the charter-drafting process. In her view, by the winter of 1994, Latino Chelsea had gained little from two-and-a-half years of receivership, but it had lost what she regarded as the largely-squandered opportunity to expand political

---

<sup>327</sup> Interview, April 6, 1995. All quotes from Marta Rosa in this section are taken from this interview unless otherwise indicated.

representation of her community to its proper proportions, and the proposed charter embodied that failure. Thus she opposed the charter, and led Chelsea's Commission on Hispanic Affairs to reject the charter in a formal vote in the weeks before the charter referendum.

Her own household, however, represented the ambivalence within the Latino community: her husband, Angel (Tito) Rosa, served on the Charter Preparation Team, and despite his own frustration with the limits of the final charter language, he stood in public support of the document, fearing the ascendancy of the Vote No forces if the charter did not pass. His wife was not a creature of this sort of pragmatic compromise. From her dual position as elected official and Hispanic Commission president, Marta Rosa saw the original imposition of receivership as not the suspension of politics but, like war, the continuation of politics by other means, and the proposed charter fell short of significant change in Chelsea's contested political space.

*Marta Rosa's Theory of Responsibility:  
BU and the Chelsea "Master Plan"*

Although she did not share Jordan's specific hypothesis about airport expansion and control of the waterfront, Rosa held the similarly Machiavellian theory that Chelsea played an unwitting role in a larger set of political aspirants: Gov. Weld, BU president Silber, and a category of players she referred to generically as "big political people." Like Jordan, Rosa ascribed the city's fell-or-was-pushed trajectory into the state's waiting hands to a scripted scenario whose *denouement* was carried out by the Finance Control Board – that board's rejection of the city's proposed budget in the summer of 1991, a triggering event to which she referred bitterly as "that whole hoax:"

**JR:** Why do you say it's a hoax?

**MR:** Because it was pre-planned.

**JR:** By people in the Department of Revenue? By the political officials?

**MR:** By a combination of big political people.

**JR:** Legislative side, governor's side, both?

**MR:** Both. Chelsea's small. If you look at Weld getting into office, it's so convenient. This happened all when Weld got into office, and Weld used to be the [US] Attorney or some position he used to have...So he knew that there was corruption in Chelsea, and the sort of back-door talk is that he had it in for Chelsea. It's small enough, it's controllable. He could make his mark in terms of being tough on crime. So it was all politically orchestrated.

Rosa argued that the governor's choice of interventions had been driven not by public-policy considerations about Chelsea itself but by key players in the political arena statewide. She maintained that Weld rejected the first option that surfaced for the city – annexation to Boston – because it would have allowed Boston mayor Raymond L. Flynn to upstage the governor, and giving a potential Democratic competitor for the corner office such a visible platform would have been unthinkable Republican political strategy. While she had opposed annexation and ultimately supported the advent of receivership as the best among bad choices, she was cynical about the political reasoning:

You know, in politics people don't do things most times...because of the outcomes for the people. They're done because of some political gain for some one person, and for Weld, it wasn't politically wise at that point. It wouldn't have made him look good. Why would he want Flynn to look like he was a good administrator, taking over this desolate town? It was much more of an investment for [Weld] to try to fix it and appoint his own people, and "Damn it, if we can do it in Chelsea with all the corruption, we're going to clean up Massachusetts."



Rosa also discerned the swifts and eddies of political influence in Chapter 200:

**MR:** When you really look deeply at the political ties between some of the city officials and state officials, then you can start to map out what the real ties are and sort of who's loyal to whom and why certain votes are taken the way they are. It's pretty sickening, to be honest, but you can sort of trace who's really in control. It's pretty amazing...[T]o a large degree,...there was no impact on that by receivership.

**JR:** By design?

**MR:** I think those powers-to-be [sic] had a hand in writing the legislation...[T]hey wrote it. I know they did. We were the only group up at the State House lobbying the day this legislation passed in the State House. It came out of those powers-to-be's offices. They wrote it very carefully. The union issues were dealt with because of Birmingham's ties to the unions. He was a labor lawyer. Some other things were safeguarded because of Voke's ties to other things...some zoning issues...<sup>328</sup>

For Rosa, however, the role played in Ald. Jordan's scenario by Massachusetts transportation politics was replaced by the raw ambitions of assorted politicians, but most particularly by BU president John Silber and his own political game-plan. In her view, the university's Chelsea experiment deliberately provided a cameo role for Silber in preparation for his run for governor in 1990:

They used Chelsea as a platform for him to [launch his campaign for governor] from. I mean, that was clear. He was campaigning on stuff that was not happening here at all, and why did Chelsea allow that to happen? They thought if Silber got in to be governor, Chelsea would be better off financially. They were looking at Silber to be a savior. After all, BU had come in to save the schools – so Silber, if he was governor, would want this project to be

---

<sup>328</sup> In fact, the firefighters were furious at what they saw as a last-minute betrayal of their contract protections – Birmingham's turn-around on an assurance that the receivership bill would not open up union contracts, and Voke's failure to block a provision that gave the receiver authority to rewrite contracts. Gov. Weld had threatened to veto any state-takeover legislation that did not give the receiver a free hand to rein in overtime and other escalating costs built into the contracts. Brian McGrory, "Union Seethes; Chelsea Legislators Feel Heat," *Boston Globe*, September 18, 1991, p. 1 (Metro/Region).

successful, okay?

By contrast to Jordan's scenario, Rosa's portrait depicted mutual exploitation, in which BU's supporters in Chelsea had anticipated that Chelsea would get special attention at the state level if Silber won.

Rosa also detected other traces of political commerce in the 1991 receivership bill. As part of its 1989 contract to run the Chelsea schools, BU made a failed attempt to be relieved of equal-education requirements – specifically, bilingual-education and special-education regulations that Silber openly opposed. From her role on the Ad Hoc Committee in the summer of 1991, she knew that BU had tried to use the receivership legislation for those exemptions:

BU had their [sic] hand in it. BU was asking for exemptions. In the receivership, they wanted to be exempted from having to follow special-ed law and bilingual-ed law...[a]s part of [the] receivership [legislation]...There was a gentleman on the Ad Hoc Committee from the Board of Education who has a child with disabilities and needs a special-ed person, and there was me on the Ad Hoc Committee. We both adamantly said, "Forget it. We will not agree to this legislation if that's in it." BU lost that round. They lost it.

Rosa lumped the BU contract and the receivership together as mechanisms purely for the political advancement of selected players, a collective "they" whose interests intersected with the opportunities available to them by way of Chelsea's crisis or crisis-management:

It's not about what's good for Chelsea. I mean, it's about...what Chelsea can do to make these people look good, because Silber was the education program [leader], wasn't he? And what's Weld? Tough on crime, tough on poor, tough on immigrants...They're [both] tough on poor. So anyway, that was well orchestrated. A lot of people have asked me, "So why does Weld care whether

Silber is successful or not in Chelsea?" But it's part of their master plan, so it doesn't matter...

Rosa saw a conspiratorial logic overriding the concerns of party politics, an unadvertised overall "master plan" in which political careers were to be built on the backs of Chelsea's disenfranchised immigrant population.

*Competing Conspiracy Theories:  
The Charter-Drafting Process & the War of the Rosas*

Discounting the actual amount of community participation, Rosa saw the charter-drafting process as a thoroughly conspiratorial – in her words, an "orchestrated" or "well-orchestrated" – enterprise, and thus a shadow-play of genuine democratic self-determination. From the beginning, Rosa had discouraged her husband's participation in the Charter Preparation Team on behalf of the Commission: "...I actually caused a tremendous political battle in my household, because I wanted Tito to withdraw from that group from the day he got in it – because I didn't think it was a legitimate process. I still don't think it was a legitimate process." She had no doubts that both the charter document and community consent would be manufactured by Spence's office, and nothing in her husband's experience persuaded her otherwise. Convinced that the charter was not a document originating in the work of the CPT, she charged, "That wasn't building consensus. That was manipulating people into agreeing with a point of view," tracing a conscientious effort to impose the terms of the charter on a restive population:

You know, this consensus-building process was really about, "This is the way we want it. What do you think?" and beating you down in public so that they isolated people who didn't have their opinion – who didn't agree, like Tito..., until they gave in because they couldn't fight it anymore. That was what that

was about. That wasn't about consensus-building. I went to three meetings and then I didn't go anymore. It was ridiculous, and I said to my husband, "You're wasting your time. You're not going to get anything you want out of there for the community," and he didn't.

Unlike Portnoy, she had not been asked to join the CPT, but like Portnoy, she had moved into a position of non-cooperation rather than dissenting participation. Similarly, she firmly believed that the CPT had been stacked to with "City Hall people" and other members responsive to the receiver. She also argued that not only had Commission activists, both white and Latino, been excluded, but that her husband had been appointed to the CPT specifically in order to disqualify her as a representative of the School Committee:

That was ludicrous, if you look at who made up [the group]...I did a count, actually, and more than half of that Preparation Team were people that were related somewhat to City Hall. Whose voice do you think they're going to support? ...You know, some people in the community were excluded from that whole scene. It was disgusting...[Hispanic Commission board member] Fran Roznowski wasn't allowed to sit on there. [Hispanic Commission staff member] Gladys Vega wasn't allowed to sit on there. I was not allowed to sit on there, not even to represent the School Committee. Chubby was told that I was not to represent [the school board] because my husband [Tito] sat on the Preparation Team...Very wisely done, very wisely orchestrated, and people may think that they went through a big process, but it was an orchestrated process.

She also claimed that the charter process had been timed intentionally to conflict with other major participatory processes, with overlapping time-frames and deadlines, in order to minimize community scrutiny and effective challenges by activists:

It was planned that way, so those of us in the community who were also working on the Enterprise Zone [application to the federal government] at the

same time and working on a million other things were kept out of that entire process – very strategically so.

The possibility that the deadlines may have overlapped independently was not entertained in a scenario where, to Rosa's unforgiving eye, the consultants had a pre-determined job to do in lock-step with an arbitrary and inadequate time-frame and were not to be dissuaded by the actual demands of democratic deliberation:

The charter process could have been such a win-win...in terms of really getting people excited about new government and really doing a process that was year-long, that really involved all the segments, and it went out to the projects and it went out to the elderly, and it really extended [across the community]. Instead, it became a process of, "How much can we get done in 30 days, and how much can we get done in 10?" And that was more important than people's input.

That's what's so devastating about that whole process. We missed a golden opportunity, and the way they did that was by excluding people who weren't in agreement with their deadlines or their process or their way of thinking about government, because they didn't want to shake the tree too much. This was told to me – that's how I know – by the consultants. "We don't want you to make such a big headway [sic] about that, because we don't want to deal with that one. We just want to get this charter written so receivership can end." So the real dialogue that could have enhanced the community and enriched the community wasn't allowed to happen. It was stifled in that process, and that's a sin. That's something Harry will have to live with, because he created that.

Echoing – while not endorsing – Portnoy's complaints about citizen participation, Rosa protested that a "real dialogue...wasn't allowed to happen." She also invoked the additional evidence derived from her direct contact with the consultants to support the plausibility of her hypothesis.

Rosa also interpreted a more ambiguous exchange with Spence as confirmation of her suspicions:

...I said to Harry at one point, "You know, there's rumors that this charter's already written. Why are you putting people through all this?" He didn't respond. He didn't say, "Oh, no, you're totally wrong!" He sort of smiled and didn't answer. Silence is golden.

This piece of implied dialogue exemplifies the rush to interpret silence with as much specificity as speech or text, particularly in the context of what already is understood as motivated action. Rosa filled that vacuum with her assumptions about the meaning of the silence, construing Spence's change of expression as tacit acknowledgment, even though it could just as easily have constituted an unspoken denial, without engaging in the argument that would accompany either position.

She also saw strong-arm political-organizing tactics at work in the way the Commission conducted its business, particularly at the marathon May 31 session, when a number of crucial decisions were made after long hours of rising tempers and in a collective state of emotional as well as physical exhaustion:

Decisions made and then changed at five o'clock in the morning? Give me a break! Legislators do that. I sit there and watch the budget all the time. They beat it out of you. By three or four in the morning, what the hell do you care what decision you make? Should there be 13 districts or 11, and where are the lines going to fall? Who the hell cares at four in the morning?

At the same time, she detected a tactical approach to keeping opponents on the CPT a step behind new developments, especially controversial ones:

...And the process was ransacked [sic] so fast that you didn't have time to catch up with all the changes. Even Tito didn't know what changes they were

making, and he had gone to the last meeting.

For Rosa the defeat of district-level School Committee representation was "devastating," the failure of "an opportunity to really give parents more of a voice...real parents, people who have kids in the school system, and that didn't happen. It was [left at] the *status quo*." To her, it also was a primary example of how issues outside the previously-determined parameters were conscientiously negated:

The most important thing for the Latino[s] was the restructuring of the School Committee, because 70 percent of those kids [enrolled in the Chelsea schools] are Latino. We didn't get that, you know? Even the notion of "how do we involve residents, legal residents?" couldn't be discussed, but it's because a dialogue was not allowed to happen. It was stifled, and it was very strategically done...That's my take on the charter.

Unlike her husband Tito, who had made a separate political judgment, she refused to support the charter document without district School Committee representation – the key structural opportunity for opening up the electoral process to the Latino grassroots. Without that provision, Rosa saw no prospect for any net change in the political status of her disenfranchised community.

*Forms Of Exile:  
Disinvestment, Displacement, & the "Anti-Movement"*

While serving primarily as an advocate for her own community, Rosa acknowledged that other constituencies in the Chelsea citizenry were themselves susceptible to forms of exclusion and retreat from self-governance. Mirroring Spence's sketch of the city's constituencies to a

remarkable extent (despite their own personal and political animosity), Rosa painted a vivid picture of the city's several forms of internal exile, both voluntary and involuntary:

A lot of people base [the city's collapse] on just finances, but it's not finances alone. Finances is one aspect, and all of the others are contributing factors to making government not work for people, and when government doesn't work for its people, then the people begin to disinvest in government and lose.

She also ascribed responsibility to the city's State House delegation for participating in a series of *deus ex machina* solutions that isolated most Chelsea residents from active decision-making:

...So that's my take on when things started going from worse to bad to worse in terms of way back to '89. I never called legislators this, but the then [so-called] city fathers who were in office didn't find a place for the community, a place for the community to be involved. Decisions were made that excluded large segments of the population, and when people aren't included in decision-making, then why should they care? Ultimately what happens, the disinvestment became much more concrete in terms of residents saying, "We no longer take care of our schools. We gave those up," and so it was easy to give over the government – the final [straw], when Brennan said, "Take the city," and that whole hoax was created with the Financial Control Board not voting in a budget...So anyway, Chelsea fell, but it started with the fall of the schools.

In addition, she argued that citywide political disinvestment grew out of a shared disgust with the quality of the city's prior political leadership. When she won her first election in 1989, "the Board of Aldermen was in a headlock with the mayor," and she watched the posturing and wrangling up close as the School Committee's non-voting emissary to the board, while other Chelsea residents saw it on their televisions at home:



The first year I was elected, I was delegate to the Board of Aldermen and I got to see everything that went on, and I did that not because I wanted to come to Monday night meetings from seven o'clock to midnight every Monday...yelling matches, screaming matches, and swearing...And another thing that we were talking about was the disinvestment of residents and citizens. Having the meetings on cable, we disillusioned a lot of people, because what the politicians do is, they make a play for the camera. They're not doing business. If you watch some of those old film clips, when all these people were in office way back in '89 and '90, you see it...They got up, they made their big speeches, and no business was getting done. Meanwhile, nobody's doing anything. You know, there isn't any planning...None of that was happening.

Her own election was greeted with fear and hostility by the city's political class, an attitude Rosa saw reflected in the local newspaper's coverage of her victory:

When I won the election, I was the first Hispanic ever elected to public office. In '89, it was a huge victory. I mean, the Hispanic community had been here probably since the '50s, 30-plus years, and this was the first time we won. And it was a big win. It wasn't like we just slightly made it. I mean, we really won, and we won it large. You know, the *Chelsea Record*, the way they portrayed it was, "Rosa wins. More trouble coming to Chelsea," was the headline. Two separate stories, but put together very cleverly...Put together very cleverly. That was the headline. I'll never forget.

Since *Record* publisher Andrew Quigley also served as a school-board member and was credited with bringing BU to Chelsea, it was impossible for Rosa to believe that the front-page layout was accidental. To her it reflected Quigley's anxiety and the anxiety of his political allies – a measure of her threat, as a progressive and persistent Latina, to their closed circle. Rosa called the ongoing demonization of immigrants, poor people, and advocates for their respective rights "the anti-movement."

The crux of the "orchestrated" scenario that Rosa assembled out of the

evidence before her was the idea of a "master plan" that was intended to bring renewal to Chelsea by replacing certain categories of residents, using the new schools to lure middle-class residents into the city limits and using the rising real-estate prices to drive the lower-income residents elsewhere. Silber had provided what Rosa considered incontrovertible evidence: the March 1989 lecture in which he had called for 5000 new families in Chelsea. Housing was not part of BU's portfolio in Chelsea, but Rosa saw him laying claim to a more ambitious purpose that was being discussed at higher levels, along with the state's plans for economic redevelopment on the Chelsea waterfront. Former alderman Jordan had viewed the waterfront as the secret prize, the object of the game, with a primary focus on the needs of the expanding airport; Rosa took that theory a step further, proposing that the state's goal was a programmatic zero-sum process of gentrification.<sup>329</sup>

...[I]t's all part of this plan, and even if you look closely at the economic-development projects that are coming in – if you look closely at...the waterfront area and the plans for that area[,]...it's about... re-shaping Chelsea, but not for the people who are currently here. One of the things that in the community we fight very hard against is displacement of the poor and displacement of immigrants, because why [displace those people when] are there so many abandoned buildings that the city isn't doing anything about?...Part of the reason why the Commission got involved with the [community] land trust and trying to do something about affordable housing is because there is a master plan to get the poor out of here.<sup>330</sup>

Rosa embedded receivership in a larger, already-scripted story of a conspiracy to exile her community not just politically but physically, a secondary forced migration of race and class. Thus she read the end of receivership not the end

---

<sup>329</sup> The Albert S. Kahn Memorial Lecture, "The Diversity of Chelsea: A Crucible for the American Dream," delivered at Boston University on March 27, 1989.

<sup>330</sup> The Mt. Auburn report lends itself to an alternate reading of its proposed economic-development program for Chelsea by sector, with particular attention to job ladders.

of a period of re-enfranchisement but a transition to the next stage of her community's resistance to economic and social displacement, and she read the draft charter in this narrative context – a context that not only justifies resistance but, as part of a never-ending struggle, requires it.

*Resistance:*

*Still Fighting But "More Aware of the Game"*

Despite her strongly-worded rejection of the charter, however, neither Rosa nor Chelsea's Commission on Hispanic Affairs put much energy into ensuring its defeat. After a heated pre-referendum board meeting, the Commission's lukewarm opposition to the charter – a resolution not to endorse the proposed document, followed by almost no active anti-charter activity – represented a posture of uncharacteristically passive resistance. Moreover, Tito Rosa's decision to sign the final proposed charter along with the rest of the CPT and Juan Vega's decision to join Tito in public support did not create a permanent split within the group. With no credible coalition to form with the Vote No committee, the Commission sat out the charter referendum, neither getting out the Latino vote nor organizing a counter-referendum boycott effort. Marta Rosa explained the logic of this relatively inactive position, even with the district School Committee issue at stake:

...[The charter supporters] will say to you, "Well, why didn't those who thought that way [*i.e.*, that district School Committee representation was paramount] come and fight?" Because there are too many battles to fight, and you have to pick and choose in your spare time, in the hours of three in the morning, which ones you're going to fight.

With the full range of education, housing, and community economic development issues competing for the group's personal and political

resources, the charter ultimately was not that high on the agenda. In this larger context, even the receivership itself had the limited significance for the Latino community:

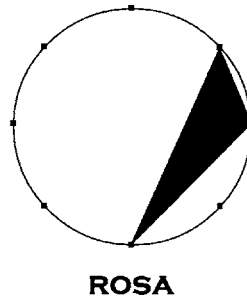
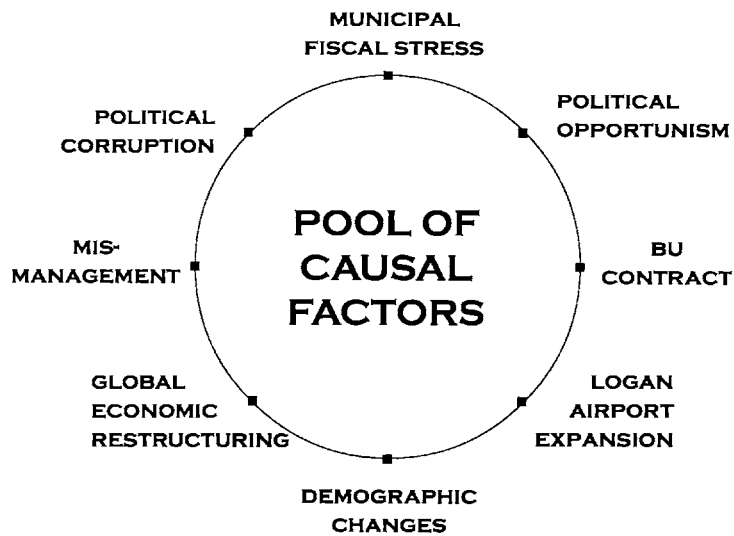
...I think when receivership came, for us in the Hispanic community who hadn't had any power anyway, and we were just beginning to...I mean, we had won one election. It wasn't like we lost anything. We didn't gain a whole lot through receivership but we didn't lose anything, either. So we weren't devastated. What had changed for us? What had really changed in the face of government? As far as we knew, we still continued to have to fight City Hall to get what we wanted. It was just that the players had changed, and we were more aware of the game.

*Conclusion:*

*Mapping the Voice of La Comisión*

Marta Rosa spoke clearly about the major causal factors that had targeted Chelsea for takeover (see Fig. 6.3): first and foremost, the entrenched Anglo community's response to "demographic changes" – in her view, a euphemism for community being largely unwelcome in Chelsea; the BU contract and the access that it gave Silber to intervene at the state level more globally in the city's affairs; and the other political opportunities for those she called "the powers-to-be." For Rosa, the dynamics of demographic change combined with the opportunities to build political careers on Chelsea's vulnerabilities were responsible for the city's collapse into receivership, after the BU contract had initiated a cycle of political disinvestment in the city's future.

## THEORIES OF RESPONSIBILITY: MARTA ROSA



**Fig. 6.3** – For Marta Rosa, the dynamics of demographic change combined with the opportunities to build political careers on Chelsea’s vulnerabilities were responsible for the city’s collapse into receivership. She identified the third critical variable as the Boston University contract to operate the public schools, which she saw as having initiated a cycle of political disinvestment in the city’s future.



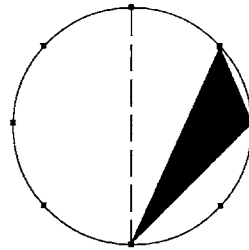
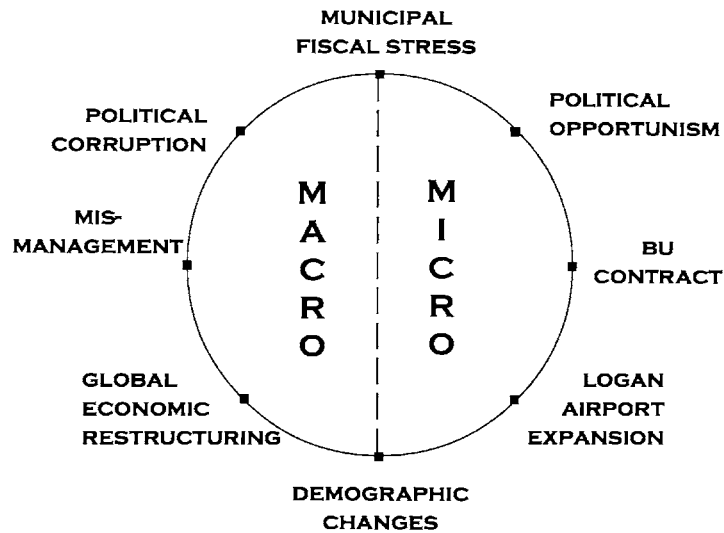
*No vs. No:  
A Comparison*

Given their other animosities, the similarities between the maps of both "Vote No" leaders Portnoy and Jordan with the map of Comision president Marta Rosa is striking. They each share two primary causal caftors, thus with an axis in common between demographic change and political opportunism. However, their characterizations of the demographic issues varied greatly. All three anti-charter advocates sit on the "micro" side of the circle – perhaps not surprising for local activists with such passionate commitments.

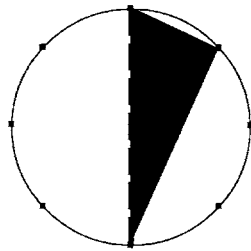




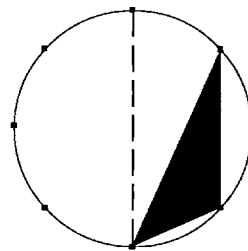
## COMPARING MAPS: ROSA, PORTNOY, & JORDAN



ROSA



PORTNOY



JORDAN

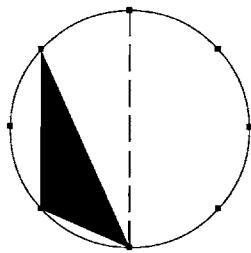
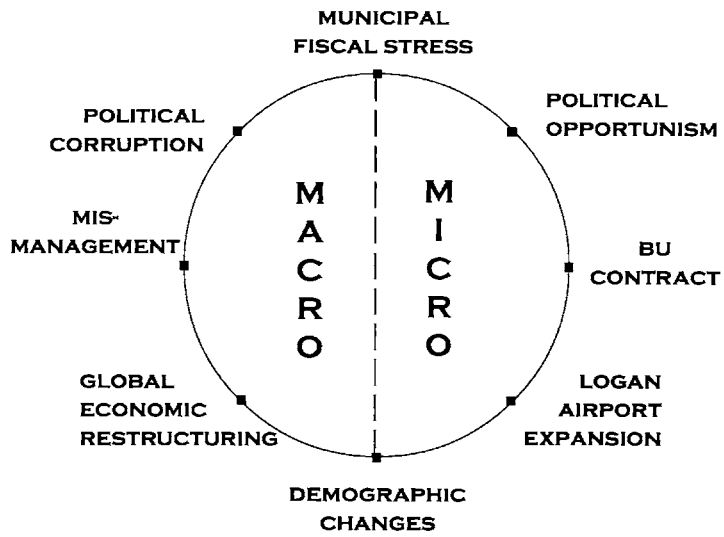
**Fig. 6.4** – Given their other animosities, the similarities between the “Vote No” (Portnoy and Jordan) maps and Hispanic Commission president (and School Committee member) Marta Rosa’s map is striking: they each share two primary causal factors, thus with an axis in common between demographic change and political opportunism. However, their characterizations of the demographic issues varied greatly. All three anti-charter advocates sit on the “micro” side of the circle – perhaps not surprising for local activists with passionate commitments.



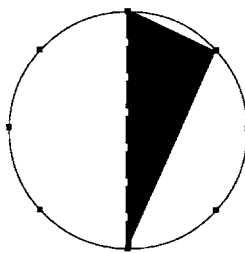
*For & Against:  
A Comparative Analysis*

Not surprisingly, the contrasts between the receiver and the two outspoken representatives of Vote No are hemispheric: their maps sit on completely opposite sides of the Macro/Micro line with no shared axes whatsoever, although they meet, significantly, at the demographic vortex (see Fig. 6.5). The differences between their narrative analyses of Chelsea's circumstances are graphic: they are stories with their backs turned toward each other. Portnoy and Jordan, of course, may have Spence in mind when they identify political opportunism as a primary variable; Portnoy, however, despite her sarcasm, will find more common ground with Spence on the new schools than some of her anti-charter allies. Jordan's tight focus on Logan Airport and the hidden transactions and relationships that would serve to promote its development would put him at odds with the receiver's economic-development strategies that looked to capitalize on potential airport-related business, particularly on the brownfields sites being decommissioned by the oil companies – the epicenter of Jordan's epiphanic aerial photograph.

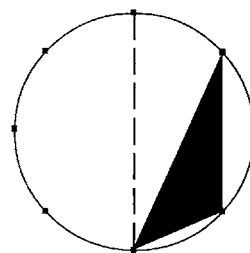




SPENCE

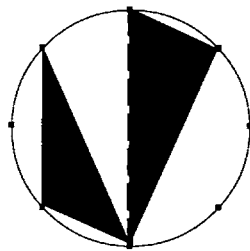


PORTNOY

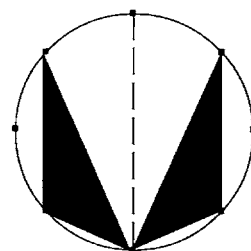


JORDAN

**COMPARING MAPS:  
SPENCE & VOTE NO**



SPENCE VS. PORTNOY



SPENCE VS. JORDAN

**Fig. 6.5** – Not surprisingly, the contrasts between the receiver and the two outspoken Vote No representatives are hemispheric: their maps sit on completely opposite sides of the macro/micro line.



**CASE ANALYSIS:  
CONCLUSION**

The range of narratives that can be extracted from the Chelsea case material could expand well beyond the examples that have been assembled here, and the confrontations between multiple interpretations of the same physical and institutional territory could extend much further across the city's landscape; as noted at the beginning of the chapter, other voices were left unsung in this exercise. While the array of Chelsea constituencies that have been represented in the case material and analysis did coalesce around important reference points, in many instances even people on same side of the most controversial issues told different stories, emphasizing different factors, filling in new data to verify or to adapt their running accounts of Chelsea's institutional life.

In the web of stories unraveled and relationships examined and histories invoked, it is almost hard to recall that the drafting of a new city charter was the original narrative hook – in part because that narrative, too, became a story with more than one ending, pressing beyond deadlines, election dates, and inaugurations. Each new development was an opportunity to re-examine the preceding events, testing for new (or re-confirmed) meaning. That the charter ultimately gave the disputed seat on the new Chelsea City Council to Rosa over Jordan appeared to confirm Vote No's suspicions that the charter was written to hoist the Latino community into political dominance. At the same time, the fight over the seat seemed to demonstrate that whatever the rules of the game, the Vote No committee would do everything in its power to obstruct the Latino community's legitimate and hard-earned political representation. Indeed, if Harry German had taken his seat, there would have

been only one Latino city councilor (Juan Vega) and no Latino representation at all on the new school committee – a significant net loss. So, as March and Olsen maintained about the political design of institutions (1989:17), the structure of the charter had mattered, tested by the it-ain't-over-till-it's-over nature of electoral politics, having routinized the rules of the game to the point where the dispute was resolved without further accusations of manipulation. In an image that became iconic, however, city manager Santagate literally waved the charter as he refused to seat a former police captain who had won a council seat in 1996 despite his prior convictions on tax-evasion charges, a case that wrangled through courts for next several years. But multiple interpretations also rippled out from the selection of Santagate as Chelsea's first city manager: to some it represented redemption of the local; to others, ratification of only marginal political change. Each crisis or vindication, in fact, became a new ending to the charter-drafting story.

After all the detail and drama, it may be most accurate to characterize the case material that has been analyzed in this chapter as thoroughly unexceptional: a typically messy, multi-variate story with multiple causes in combinations that cannot be measured precisely or where the presence of a given factor can only be inferred, and where a method for narrative analysis is a critical technology.



## VII. CONCLUSION

*Interlude:*

*"Thinking Historically"*

In the summer of 2001, a report in the *New York Times* announced the formation of the International Center for Transitional Justice, whose mission is to help countries emerging from civil war and state-sponsored terrorism.<sup>331</sup> The story noted that the center's founding director, previously the deputy chair of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, had been sought out for his special expertise: the experience of presiding over a public forum where, in exchange for amnesty, both victims and perpetrators documented human-rights abuses – in this case, the transgressions and violations of the apartheid era. The truth commission is a significant institutional departure from the post-World War II model of the international war-crimes tribunal, and offers a radically different conception of justice. Punishment in the traditional sense – prison terms or execution – is not the goal, nor vengeance the objective. In some wholly literal way, narrative becomes not only the vehicle but the substance of justice, and these commissions establish the visible link between truth (that is, a combination of factual evidence and first-person corroboration) and reconciliation: between a brutally public form of accountability and the remarkable absence of any further publicly-authorized revenge. It is a powerful act of faith that telling a story diminishes its power to control the future, that the combination of accountability and amnesty somehow intercepts the pattern of reciprocity.

---

<sup>331</sup> "For Nations Traumatized by the Past, New Remedies," by Tamar Lewin, July 29, 2001, p. 4.

By contrast, a war-crimes tribunal is underway in the Hague to prosecute Serb demagogue Slobodan Milosevic in the wake of a bloody conflict where such critical reflection not yet possible: the Balkans, where history seems to be worn on the outside of the body, as a kind of exoskeleton. These states of southeastern Europe in and around the former Yugoslavia have come to epitomize the irresolvable conflict where each party brings its history, its mutual suspicions, and its respective sense of threatened autonomy and injury (or worse) at the hands of the other; it even has entered the language as a word, "balkanized," for the intractably factional. Generations of European and American writers have despaired of making sense of the Balkans, a place that seems possessed by its history, a landscape inhabited by a demonic family of *genius loci*. In search of political insight in the 1980s, American journalist Robert Kaplan sought out Milovan Djilas, the former Yugoslavian vice-president who had negotiated with Stalin for Yugoslav autonomy and then, with great moral and physical courage, turned on the totalitarian Soviet regime. The aging dissident was an acute observer of the turbulent Balkan scene, anticipating his country's internal combustion following Yugoslav strongman Tito's death in 1980, and not only the rise but also the staying power of Milosevic. Kaplan marveled at Djilas' apparent clairvoyance:

After the first visits, our conversations became eerie affairs, because I realized that Djilas was always right. He was able to predict the future. His technique was a simple one...: he seemed to ignore the daily newspapers and think purely historically. The present for him was merely a stage of the past moving quickly into the future. What appeared inconceivable to conventional analysts was always the natural outcome to him (1994:74).

Kaplan ascribed to Djilas an intellectual method, somehow defying "conventional" analysis, that allowed him to think "purely historically" and

therefore identify the "natural outcome."

A paradox resides here, however. While in Djilas the capacity for attention to history appears a virtue, Kaplan otherwise describes a region so consumed with thinking "purely historically" that there can be no mutually tolerable practical present, only the fevered anticipation of the reincarnation of extinct empires. Kaplan did his own thought-experiment about the centuries-old dispute over another Balkan state, Macedonia:

I closed my eyes to re-imagine the grainy, smoke-ridden tableaux according to each racial and linguistic claim, and different interpretation of history...Each nation demands that its borders revert to where they were at the exact time when its own empire had reached its zenith of ancient medieval expansion. Because Philip of Macedon and his son, Alexander the Great, had established a great kingdom in Macedonia in the fourth century BC, the Greeks believed Macedonia to be theirs. Because the Bulgarians at the end of the tenth century under King Samuel and again in the thirteenth century under King Ivan Assen II had extended the frontiers of Bulgaria all the way west to the Adriatic Sea, Bulgarians believed Macedonia to be theirs. Because King Stefan Dushan had overrun Macedonia in the fourteenth century and had made Skopje, in Dame Rebecca [West]'s words, "a great city, and there he had been crowned one Easter Sunday Emperor and Autocrat of the Serbs and Byzantines, the Bulgars and the Albanians," the Serbs believed Macedonia to be theirs (1994:49, 57-8).

Almost 2500 years of thinking "purely historically" in this case seems not a method of analysis but a form of entrapment, nor does it suggest the possibility of an outcome other than perpetual commitments to the overlapping polygons of phantom countries. Even the title of Kaplan's book, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History*, refers to the haunting presence of the undead, whose heavy hand seems to drive the living toward hatred and terror, toward atrocities that replenish the land with ghosts and with reasons for more violence.

British war correspondent Anthony Loyd, a former British Army officer on a free-lance quest into a new war-zone, arrived in Sarajevo when it was still one of the last outposts of integrated secular co-existence in the region, and from there to the burnt and butchered villages of Bosnia. Like Kaplan, he found a world dwelling in its ancient history: "Few fighters spoke of Muslims, Croats and Serbs any more, it was all Turks, Ustasa and Cetniks," the historical overlay "a clumsy force-fit parody of previous conflicts that never quite squeezed into the new reality" (1999:112). But he witnessed something even more confusing when he accompanied a Muslim liaison officer to the Serb side to arrange the recovery of casualties from the no-man's-land between the two lines, a display of casual fraternity in the midst of civil war:

The Serb [officer] sounded tired. He and [the Bosnian Muslim] talked like two old friends discussing an issue at work; there was neither malice nor coldness. It appears that nearly all of the fighters knew one another from before the war, having either been to school together, served in the same JNA [Yugoslavian army] unit, or gotten drunk together...[T]he two men began to talk about mutual friends. How was Huso? Huso was wounded. Shit. Mladen? He left Bosnia last month, yeah, with his family, got out to Novi Sad. Lucky bastard. [The Muslim soldier's] brother had been wounded a few days before, shot in the head by a Serb sniper...The news of it seemed genuinely to upset the Serb officer. "I am so sorry," he said, shaking his head. "*I mene*" – and me – replied [the other soldier] (1999:114-5).

This ordinary exchange, made extraordinary by the surrounding brutality, left Loyd even more mystified by the nature of the conflict:

What defined these two groups? Race? They were the same race. Culture? They were all Tito-era children. Religion? No man present had the first clue about the tenets of his own faith, be it Orthodox [Christianity] or Islam. They were southern Slav brothers, pitted in conflict by the rising phoenix of long-dead

banners raised by men whose only wish was power, *vlast*, and in doing so had create a self-perpetuating cycle of fear and death that grew in Bosnia, feeding off its own evil like a malignant tumour. Rendezvous such as these were not avenues in which to see division and hatred. The war was about polarity and separation...It was often easier to understand a world of Cetniks, Turks and Ustasa than this (1999:115).<sup>332</sup>

Parallels between Yugoslavia and the working life of planners might seem far-fetched, even histrionic. But planning conflicts occur in metaphorically "balkanized" environments, where fissures along racial, ethnic, religious, language, gender, class, ideological, and experiential lines create divided histories – stories told from vastly different perspectives that harden into diametrically opposed, often multi-polar interpretations of the same constellation of events, feeding political resistance grounded in historical experience and institutional memory. The same dilemma pertains: how is it possible to think "purely historically" but not *only* historically? Despite Kaplan's observation, Djilas did not ignore the daily newspapers but in fact read them quite carefully, with some exquisite ability to assess the significance of unfolding events in a larger context.<sup>333</sup> Planners might pause to wonder: what set of skills does it take to be fluent in these powerful historical narratives and to detect their the depth of their workings in the immediate without being held captive by them? How can a practitioner better understand their critical role in setting the dimensions of the political space available for intervention, conflict resolution, or the possibility of action? And how, most challenging of all, can the the powers of narrative be mobilize

---

<sup>332</sup> British spelling of "tumour" as in the original. Politically apathetic when he arrived and then outraged by the "vitriolic propaganda, pogroms, and massacres," Loyd progressively lost his "wandering impartiality" and became increasingly enraged by the passivity of the West as the Croat and then the Serb campaigns of "ethnic cleansing" proceeded.

<sup>333</sup> Asked what would happen to Yugoslavia when the rest of Eastern Europe molted at mid-decade, he "smiled viciously: 'Like Lebanon. Wait and see' " (1994:75).



inflammatory and destructive ways. That the disingenuous use or abuse of narrative is a skill at which demagogues excel is no reason for practitioners to forego its analytic benefits or their own responsibilities. All the more reason for narrative vigilance.





# BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alcaly, Roger E., and David Mermelstein, eds. 1977. *The Fiscal Crisis of American Cities: Essays on the Political Economy of Urban America with Special Reference to New York*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Arnstein, Sherry. 2001 (1969). A Ladder of Citizen Participation. In *The City Reader*, edited by R. T. LeGates and F. Stout. New York: Routledge.
- Banfield, Edward C. 1961. *Political Influence*. Glencoe IL: The Free Press.
- Beauregard, Robert A. 1993. *Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of American Cities*. Cambridge MA: Blackwell.
- . 1995. Edge Critics. *Journal of Planning Education & Research* 14 (3):163-166.
- . 1999 (1996). Between Modernity and Postmodernity: The Ambiguous Position of American Planning. In *Readings in Planning Theory*, edited by S. Campbell and S. S. Fainstein. Malden MA: Blackwell.
- Becker, Howard S. 1998. *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think about Your Research While You're Doing It*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Beltran, Ximena, Mayra Rodriguez, Joan Straussman, and Elisabeth Zweig. 1976. *A View From Under the Bridge: A Plan for Hispanics in Chelsea*. Chelsea MA: Care About Now.
- Bettleheim, Bruno. 1977. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Bruner, Jerome. 1998 (1990). *Acts of Meaning*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Camus, Albert. 1956. *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Castells, Manuel. 1983. *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements*. London: E. Arnold.
- Center for Community Planning and Collaborative for Community Service and Development. 1990. *Hispanics in Chelsea*. Boston: University of Massachusetts at Boston, College of Public and Community Service.
- Chelsea Oversight Panel. 1994. *Report on Implementation of the Boston University/Chelsea Partnership Program*.
- Chelsea Planning Board. 1955. *First Report on a General Plan for Chelsea*.
- Chelsea Redevelopment Authority. 1974. *Draft Environmental Impact Statement: Murray Industrial Park Urban Renewal Project*.
- Cicourel, Aaron V. 1998. Text and Context: Cognitive, Linguistic, and Organizational Dimensions in International Negotiations. *Negotiation Journal* 7:257-266.
- Clavel, Pierre. 1986. *The Progressive City: Planning and Participation, 1969-1984*. New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Cobb, Sara J. 1991. Einsteinian Practice and Newtonian Discourse: An Ethical Crisis in Mediation. *Negotiation Journal* 1:87-102.
- . 1993. Empowerment and Mediation: A Narrative Perspective. *Negotiation Journal* 7:245-259.
- . 1994. 'Theories of Responsibility:' The Social Construction of Intentions in Mediation.

- Discourse Processes* 18:165-186.
- . 2000. Negotiation Pedagogy: Learning to Learn. *Negotiation Journal* 16 (4):315-319.
- Coetzee, J. M. 1988. *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*. New Haven CT: Yale University Press.
- Cohen, Rich. 2000. *The Avengers: A Jewish War Story*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Colgan, Charles, and Joseph S. Slavet. 1993. *The Fiscal Crisis in the States: Lessons from the Northeast*. Portland ME: University of Southern Maine – Edmund Muskie Institute of Public Affairs.
- Dahl, Robert A. 1961. *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City*. New Haven CT: Yale University Press.
- Darden, Joe T., Richard Child Hill, June Thomas, and Richard Thomas. 1987. *Detroit: Race and Uneven Development*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Davidoff, Paul. 1965. Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 31 (4).
- Dietz, James L. 1986. *Economic History of Puerto Rico: Institutional Change and Capitalist Development*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Domhoff, G. William. 1978. *Who Really Rules? New Haven and Community Power Re-Examined*. New Brunswick NJ: Transaction Books.
- Dumont, Dr. Matthew (Dr. Hugh Drummond). 1992. *Treating the Poor: A Personal Sojourn Through the Rise and Fall of Community Mental Health*. Belmont MA: Dymphna Press.
- . 1994. Deep in the Heart of Chelsea. *Mother Jones* 19 (2).
- Durrell, Lawrence. 1958. *Balthazar*. New York: E. P. Dutton.
- . 1958. *Mountolive*. London: Faber and Faber.
- . 1960. *Clea*. New York: E. P. Dutton.
- . 1961 (1957). *Justine*. New York: E. P. Dutton.
- Espada, Martín. 1991 (1990). *Rebellion is the Circle of a Lover's Hands/Rebelión es el giro de manos del amante*. Translated by C. Pérez-Bustillo and M. Espada. Willimantic CT: Curbstone Press.
- . 1994 (1993). *City of Coughing and Dead Radiators*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.
- Fainstein, Susan S., Norman I. Fainstein, Richard Child Hill, Dennis Judd, and Michael Peter Smith. 1986. *Restructuring the City: The Political Economy of Urban Redevelopment*. New York: Longman.
- Fernandez, Ronald. 1996. *The Disenchanted Island: Puerto Rico and the United States in the Twentieth Century*. 2nd ed. Westport CT: Praeger.
- Firth, Alan, ed. 1994. *The Discourse of Negotiation: Studies of Language in the Workplace*. Tarrytown NY: Elsevier Science Inc.
- Fischer, Frank, and John Forester, eds. 1993. *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.
- Fitzhugh, Louise. 1964. *Harriet the Spy*. New York: Dell Publishing Co.
- Forester, John. 1987. How Planners Argue: Rhetorical Strategies and Problems of Substance, Power, and Passion in Planning Practice. In *Planning Theory in the 1990s: New Directions*, edited by R. Burchell and G. Sternlieb. Washington D.C.
- . 1993. *Critical Theory, Public Policy, and Planning Practice: Toward a Critical Pragmatism*. Edited by P. Green, *SUNY Series in Political Theory: Contemporary Issues*. Albany NY: State

- University of New York Press.
- . 1994. Political Deliberation, Critical Pragmatism, and Traumatic Histories: On Not Leaving Your Pain at the Door".
- . 1995. Democratic Deliberation and the Promise of Planning.
- . 1999. *The Deliberative Practitioner: Encouraging Participatory Planning Processes*. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press.
- Forester, John, and D. Stitzel. 1989. Beyond Neutrality: The Possibilities of Activist Mediation in Public Sector Conflicts. *Negotiation Journal* 7:251-264.
- Friedmann, John. 1989. Planning in the Public Domain: Discourse and Praxis. *Journal of Planning Education & Research* 8 (2):128-130.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gelfand, Mark I. 1975. *A Nation of Cities: The Federal Government and Urban America, 1933-1965*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Habib, Fred. 1993. Why Chelsea Went into Receivership.
- Haroian-Guerin, Gil, ed. 1999. *The Personal Narrative: Writing Ourselves as Teachers and Scholars*. Portland ME: Calendar Islands Publishers.
- Healey, Patsy. 1992. A Planner's Day: Knowledge and Action in Communicative Practice. *Journal of the American Planning Association* 58 (1):9-20.
- . 1999 (1996). Planning Through Debate: The Communicative Turn in Planning Theory. In *Readings in Planning Theory*, edited by S. Campbell and S. S. Fainstein. Malden MA: Blackwell.
- Hendrickson, Susan Emery, and Edmund Beard. 1993. Governance Reform in Chelsea, Massachusetts: Historical Analysis and Future Directions. Boston: John W. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs – University of Massachusetts at Boston.
- Hoch, Charles J. 1984. Pragmatism, Planning, and Power. *Journal of Planning Education & Research* 4 (2):86-95.
- . 1992. The Paradox of Power in Planning Practice. *Journal of Planning Education & Research* 11 (3):206-215.
- Holli, Melvin G. 1969. *Reform in Detroit: Hazen S. Pingree and Urban Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hunter, Floyd. 1979 (1953). *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers*. Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Innes, Judith E. 1995. Planning Theory's Emerging Paradigm: Communicative Action and Interactive Practice. *Journal of Planning Education & Research* 14 (3):183-9.
- . 1998. Information in Communicative Planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association* 64 (1):52-63.
- Inin, Engin F. 1992. *Cities Without Citizens: The Modernity of the City as a Corporation*. Montréal: Black Rose Books.
- JGA Planners/Architects. 1974. A New Direction: Recommended Plan for the Re-use of the Naval Hospital, Chelsea, Massachusetts (Final Report: Volume 1).
- Jordan, Donald M. 1994. What Are the Reasons Why Chelsea Went into State Ordered Receivership?
- Kaplan, Robert D. 1994. *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History*. New York: Vintage Books.

- Kermode, Frank. 1981. Secrets and Narrative Sequence. In *On Narrative*, edited by W. J. T. Mitchell. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- . 2000 (1966). *The Sense of An Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Keyes, Langley C., Jr. 1969. *The Rehabilitation Planning Game: A Study in the Diversity of Neighborhood*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Kopf, Edward J. 1974. *The Intimate City, A Study of Urban Social Order: Chelsea, Massachusetts, 1906-1915*. unpublished dissertation, Brandeis University, Waltham MA.
- Krumholz, Norman, and John Forester. 1990. *Making Equity Planning Work: Leadership in the Public Sector*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- KS Associates. 1986. Management Study for the City of Chelsea, Final Report.
- Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. 1981 (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Langmyhr, Tore. 2000. The Rhetorical Side of Transport Planning. *European Planning Studies* 8 (5):669-684.
- Lauria, Mickey. 1995. Planning Theory and Political Economy: A Symposium. *Planning Theory* 14.
- Laws, David. 1996. The Practice of Fairness. *Environmental Impact Assessment Review* 16:65-70.
- Lee, Chang-Rae. 1995. *Native Speaker*. New York: Riverhead Books.
- Logan, John R., and Harvey Molotch. 1987. *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Logan, John R., and Todd Swanstrom. 1990. *Beyond the City Limits: Urban Policy and Economic Restructuring in Comparative Perspective*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Long, Norton E. 1962. The Local Community as an Ecology of Games. In *The Polity*. Chicago: Rand McNally & Co.
- Loyd, Anthony. 1999. *My War Gone By, I Miss It So*. New York: Penguin.
- Mandelbaum, Seymour. 1991. Telling Stories. *Journal of Planning Education & Research* 10 (3):209-214.
- Mandelbaum, Seymour J., Luigi Mazza, and Robert W. Burchell, eds. 1996. *Explorations in Planning Theory*. New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Center for Urban Policy Research.
- March, James G., and Johan P. Olsen. 1989. *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics*. New York: The Free Press.
- Marcus, Greil. *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Marris, Peter. 1987 (1982). *Meaning and Action: Community Planning and Conception of Change*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Massachusetts Executive Office of Administration and Finance. 1991. Statement of Findings: City of Chelsea.
- Massachusetts Municipal Association. 1986. Budget Perspective Report.
- Mattingly, Cheryl. 1989. *Thinking With Stories: Stories and Experience in a Clinical Practice*. Unpublished dissertation, Department of Urban Studies & Planning and the Anthropology/ Archaeology Program, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge.

- Meléndez, Edwin. 1994. Competing Explanations of Latino Poverty. In *Latino Poverty and Public Policy*. Boston: The Boston Foundation.
- Meléndez, Edwin, and Miren Uriarte, eds. 1993. *Latino Poverty and Economic Development in Massachusetts*. Boston: Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy.
- Menkel-Meadow, Carrie. 1995. The Many Ways of Mediation: The Transformation of Traditions, Ideologies, Paradigms, and Practices. *Negotiation Journal* 7:217-242.
- Miller, Gary J. 1981. *Cities by Contract: The Politics of Municipal Incorporation*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- Milroy, Beth M. 1991. Into Postmodern Weightlessness. *Journal of Planning Education & Research* 10 (3):181-187.
- Mitchell, W. J. T., ed. 1981. *On Narrative*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Mollenkopf, John. 1983. *The Contested City*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Monkkonen, Eric H. 1984. The Politics of Municipal Indebtedness and Default, 1859-1936. In *The Politics of Urban Fiscal Policy*, edited by T. J. McDonald and S. K. Ward. Beverly Hills CA: Sage Publications.
- Moore, Sally F. 1985. Dividing the Pot of Gold: Social and Symbolic Elements in an Instrumental Negotiation. *Negotiation Journal* 1:29-43.
- Morales, Rebecca, and Frank Bonilla, eds. 1993. *Latinos in a Changing US Economy: Comparative Perspectives on Growing Inequality*. Edited by J. H. Stanfield, II. Vol. 7, *Sage Series on Race and Ethnic Relations*. Newbury Park CA: Sage Publications.
- Mt. Auburn Associates. 1993. *The Chelsea Initiative: An Economic Development Strategy for the City of Chelsea (Final Report)*.
- Murray, Janet H. 1998. *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- O'Neill, Theresa DeLeane. 1996. *Disciplined Hearts: History, Identity, and Depression in an American Indian Community*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Peattie, Lisa. 1990. Anthropology and Planning. *Journal of Planning Education & Research* 9 (2):101-106.
- Podziba, Susan L. 1998. *Social Capital Formation, Public-Building, and Public Mediation: The Chelsea Charter Consensus Process*. Dayton OH: Kettering Foundation.
- Portes, Alejandro, and Alex Stepick. 1993. *City on the Edge: The Transformation of Miami*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone; The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Pynoos, Jon. 1986. *Breaking the Rules: Bureaucracy and Reform in Public Housing*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Robinson, Marc. 1994. *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co.
- Ross, Robert J. S., and Jean A. Riesman. 1994. Choosing Your Parents Well: Structure, Competence, and Corruption in Coping with Municipal Fiscal Stress. In *Municipal Fiscal Stress in Massachusetts: Prognosis and Prescription*, edited by J. S. Slavet. Boston: Joseph W. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Massachusetts at Boston.
- Rubenstein, Danny. 1991. *The People of Nowhere: The Palestinian Vision of Home*. Translated by I.

- Friedman. New York: Times Books.
- Rubin, Jerome, and Thomas Campbell. 1983. Chelsea: A Mayor Proposes. In *Proposition 2 1/2: Its Impact on Massachusetts*, edited by L. E. Susskind and J. F. Serio. Cambridge: Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain.
- Said, Edward W. 1994 (1993). *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- . 1995 (1994). *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, 1969-1994*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Sandercock, Leonie. 1995. Voices from the Borderlands: A Meditation on a Metaphor. *Journal of Planning Education & Research* 14 (2):77-88.
- , ed. 1998. *Making the Invisible Visible: A Multicultural Planning History*. Vol. 2, *California Studies in Critical Human Geography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Schafer, Roy. 1981. Narration in the Psychoanalytic Dialogue. In *On Narrative*, edited by W. J. T. Mitchell. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Schön, Donald A. 1978. Generative Metaphor: A Perspective on Problem-Setting in Social Policy. In *Metaphor and Thought*, edited by A. Ortony. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 1983. *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. New York: Basic Books.
- Schwartz, Michael. 1976. *Radical Protest and Social Structure: The Southern Farmers' Alliance and Cotton Tenancy, 1880-1890*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Simpson, John, ed. 1995. *The Oxford Book of Exile*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Stone, Deborah A. 1988. *Policy Paradox and Political Reason*. Glenview IL: Scott, Foresman and Co.
- Susskind, Lawrence, and Patrick Field. 1996. *Dealing with an Angry Public: The Mutual Gains Approach to Resolving Disputes*. New York: Free Press.
- Swanstrom, Todd. 1985. *The Crisis of Growth Politics: Cleveland, Kucinich, and the Challenge of Urban Populism*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Tabb, William K., and Larry Sawers, eds. 1984 (1978). *Marxism and the Metropolis: New Perspectives in Urban Political Economy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- The Planning Services Group (TPSG). 1968. *Comprehensive Plan: Economic Activity*. A Plan Prepared for Chelsea. Cambridge MA.
- Throgmorton, James A. 1992. Planning as Persuasive Storytelling about the Future: Negotiating an Electrical Power Rate Settlement in Illinois. *Journal of Planning Education & Research* 12 (1):17-31.
- . 1993. Planning as a Rhetorical Activity: Survey Research as a Trope in Arguments about Electric-Power Planning in Chicago. *Journal of the American Planning Association* 59 (3):334-346.
- . 1996. "Impeaching" Research: Planning as Persuasive and Constitutive Discourse. In *Explorations of Planning Theory*, edited by S. J. Mandelbaum, L. Mazza and R. W. Burchell. New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Center for Urban Policy Research.
- . 2000. On the Virtues of Skillful Meandering: Acting as a Skilled-Voice-in-the-Flow of Persuasive Argumentation. *Journal of the American Planning Association* 66 (4):367-379.
- Throgmorton, James A., and Peter S. Fisher. 1993. Institutional Change and Electric Power in the City of Chicago. *Journal of Economic Issues* 27 (1):117-152.
- Touche Ross & Co. 1989. *Investigation of Methods by which the City of Chelsea Might Encourage Economic Development and Increase Its Revenue Generation*.

- Turner, Victor. 1974. *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Edited by V. Turner, *Symbol, Myth, and Ritual Series*. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press.
- . 1981. Social Dramas and Stories about Them. In *On Narrative*, edited by W. J. T. Mitchell. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Uriarte, Miren, Paul Osterman, Carol Hardy-Fanta, and Edwin Meléndez, eds. 1993. *Latinos in Boston: Confronting Poverty, Building Community, Beyond Poverty: Building Community Through New Perspectives*. Boston: The Boston Foundation.
- Van Maanen, John. 1988. *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- White, Hayden. 1978. *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- . 1981. The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality. In *On Narrative*, edited by W. J. T. Mitchell. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- . 1989 (1987). *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Wilkinson, L. 1995. How to Build Scenarios: Planning for "Long Fuse, Big Bang" Problems in an Era of Uncertainty. *Wired*, 74-81.
- Yates, Douglas. 1977. *The Ungovernable City: The Politics of Urban Problems and Policy Making*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Yin, Robert K. 1984. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Beverly Hills CA: Sage Publications.

