

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: DISCIPLINE AND CHAOS

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There is no poetry in NERR Proceedings. So I'm going to rectify that and start with a few lines from a poem by W.H. Auden that have both amused and taunted me since I read them over 30 years ago. Entitled, "Under Which Lyre," it was the Phi Beta Kappa poem, delivered at Harvard University, in 1946. Auden compared the lyres of Apollo and Hermes to convey his concerns with changes he saw happening in America's universities. Two verses in early parts in the piece establish the main point, followed by Auden's advice in the closing verses.

The sons of Hermes love to play,
And only do their best when they
Are told they oughtn't;
Apollo's children never shrink
From boring jobs but have to think
Their work important.

Then, speaking of Apollo's child:
And when he occupies a college,
Truth is replaced by Useful Knowledge;
He pays particular
Attention to Commercial Thought,
Public Relations, Hygiene, Sport
In his curricula.

Next, speaking of the venerable scholars:

In our morale must lie our strength:
So, that we may behold at length
Routed Apollo's
Battalions melt away like fog,
Keep well the Hermetic Decalogue,
Which runs as follows:

Thou shalt not do as the dean pleases,
Thou shalt not write thy doctor's thesis
On education
Thou shalt not worship projects nor
Shall thou or thine bow down before
Administration.

Thou shalt not answer questionnaires
Or quizzes upon World-Affairs,
Nor with compliance
Take any test. Thou shalt not sit
With statisticians nor commit

A social science.

Thou shalt not be on friendly terms
With guys in advertising firms (and so on. Add
this poem to your must read list)

Auden expressed the view of a brilliant humanist as the university tilted toward the "useful," but a useful dramatically limited to producing workers while reducing the role and stature of the humanities; history, philosophy,

literature and the arts, which expose us to a common heritage of political, social and ethical growth, a common humanity and a common civility. Education for work can fall short of education for citizenship. Good workers are not automatically good citizens.

Our own work is based on discipline, as a personal trait as well as mastery of content and method, and we do it well. But we do it in a milieu, which seems increasingly chaotic; perhaps even insane. You need no reminder that this is the wealthiest country in the world, and we like to believe, the most democratic and also best educated. If so, how can we explain:

1. Twenty percent of the nation's children on or below the poverty line.
2. Over two million people in jail; more people in jail in California than in all
3. of Great Britain and Germany combined (Gray, 1998:116).
4. Two hundred million guns in private hands and nine times more child homicides than in the next fifteen industrialized nations combined.
5. Consumers not having the right to know if the food they buy has been genetically altered or the milk they drink from cows fed rBGH.
6. As of December, 1999, 10 out of 10 international trade disputes involving the environment or public health were settled by requiring one of the nations to weaken its regulations.
7. Accepting a standard of levels for lead in children's blood (10 mcg/dL) known to impair hearing and diminish IQ scores 4-7%.
8. Street crime costing about \$3.8 billion annually and corporate crime costing an estimated \$3 trillion (Franklin, 1999:1).
9. To pay market rent for a two bedroom apartment would require increasing the minimum wage 171% nationwide, and from 300 to 430% in large metropolitan areas.

These mere eight items barely scratch the surface and everyone here knows that. Still, we who are disciplined and work too many hours carry on, loyal and congenial troopers amidst the chaos – if not insanity. Are those matters not our business? Are we too busy? Or, as Thoreau suggested, perhaps we don't care.

Nearly everyone here works for government at some level, or for a university that derives at least some support from taxes. To serve the public has always been a noble ideal, one to which we cling despite a sense of being compromised beyond recognition. Intellectually independent people saying what the evidence leads them to often become pariahs. We brand them misfits, but amidst chaos and insanity the misfits are the rational ones no longer able to toe the institutional line. In How Institutions Think, Mary Douglas (1986:32) observed that, "for us, the hope of intellectual independence is to resist, and the first step in resistance is to discover how the institutional grip is laid upon a person's mind."

Those in government see the institutional grip in their agencies. Universities are not immune: "Thou shalt not (Auden said) do as the Dean pleases." But more is involved than agency culture or tradition. The encompassing and powerful grip is that of our economic institutions and the contamination of politics by libertarian economic dogma.

Suppose we accepted the argument that we work not for a democratic government but an oligarchy. As Lewis Lapham (1996:35) observed, we have a permanent and a provisional government, and should not confuse the two:

The permanent government, a secular oligarchy ... comprises the Fortune 500 companies and their attendant lobbyists, the big media and entertainment syndicates, the civil and military services, the larger research universities and law firms. It is this government that hires the country's politicians and sets the terms and conditions under which the country's citizens can exercise their right - God given but increasingly expensive - to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Obedient to the rule of men, not laws, the permanent government oversees the production of wealth, builds cities, manufactures goods, raises capital, fixes prices, shapes the landscape, reserves the right to assume debt, poison rivers, cheat the customers, receive the gifts of federal subsidy, and speak to the American people in the language of low motive and base emotion.

The provisional government is the spiritual democracy that comes and goes on the trend of a political season and oversees the production of pageants. (And so on. Add this article to your must read list too).

There is nothing new about this except for the growth and concentration of oligarchic power. By a protracted but not bloodless coup, it now controls the media as it does the military, as well as the government and the political process. There is time only to sketch how this came about, and the consequences.

A central source of power is the contamination of political philosophy by libertarian economic dogma. This has been legitimized by academic economists promoting Public Choice theory and its adopted child, Law and Economics. Public Choice theory applies free-market assumptions to politics starting with the assumptions that all parties to government are self-interested, and that government is just another free-market where we compete as equals. To these fundamental but faulty assumptions is added the argument that markets are rational, efficient, and self-regulating, and while admitting that sometimes markets fail, since they self-correct government must leave them alone. Because when government intercedes, the theory goes, it inevitably makes matters worse. All this is couched in innocuous, often patronizing language and camouflaged in formulas and mathematical models that give the appearance of hard, quantitative science. "Even if the results are trivial,

formalistic, and tautological, and when they are falsified, the proponents can argue (as Public Choice scholars often do), 'At least we try to be scientific'" (Kuttner 1999:341).

Public Choice theory gains currency partly because we are by tradition skeptical of government and fearful of its power, but mainly because libertarian economics is congenial to the oligarchy, since it discredits everything except laissez-faire. One result has been deregulation, thus increasingly concentrated wealth and power in a "winner-take-all" economy. Another result is oligarchic control of the political process. Campaign finance is just one of the weapons in the oligarchs' arsenal. Since a half-dozen syndicates control more than half of the nation's media outlets (AT&T; Viacom/CBS; Disney/ABC/Capital Cities; AOL/Time Warner; Murdoch's News Corporation; Westinghouse) and since much of the cost of modern campaigns is for TV ads, public elections mean handing over huge sums to the syndicate for use of the public's air waves. Deregulation has also made a mockery of the public interest criteria in licensing stations or regulating content. And government support for public radio has been slashed to \$250 million dollars, a small fraction of what other democratic nations spend. A more blatant display of the media syndicate's power is noted later.

Private control of the media also mean that although some reporters may be liberal, the media are profoundly conservative. Cheap, cynical shots at government and civil servants are commonplace (cf. Crenshaw, 2000). Further, not only does television destroy civic capital -about which economics is mute - it also reduces political discourse to sound bites, which is why television news is an oxymoron, and why Mario Cuomo failed at talk radio while Rush Limbaugh and G. Gordon Liddy succeed.

Much of the degradation of political democracy is the result precisely of market forms and norms taking over the political process. A prime culprit is television, a medium first of marketing, and second of purveying entertainment useful for delivering mass audiences to a sponsor. Education and deliberation, much less civic uplift, are not part of this equation (Kuttner, 1996:348).

The absence of information and reflection is compounded by a pervasive dishonesty; attack ads and deliberate distortions of political campaigns, base appeals and deliberate deceptions of commercial speech and image. Beyond being shameless, "The real evil that follows a commercial dishonesty so general as ours is the intellectual dishonesty it generates" (Chapman, in Lapham, 1998:8).

The university has its own forms of dishonesty and has contributed to our current state in other ways. It legitimized Public Choice theory and programs on Law and Economics. It entertained desconstructionists who trashed the past, undermined any foundation for determining what is true, gave all opinions equal status and created an intellectual egalitarianism devoid of standards. This reinforced psychology, which is individualistic and perception oriented, which in turn reinforced the marketers

who serve providers rather than the public, and produce consumers rather than citizens.

In sum, the argument that Lapham, Kuttner, and scores of others make is that libertarian economic ideology congenial to the wealthy and powerful has transformed democracy into an oligarchy which includes media syndicates which are anti-government, degrade political discourse, and feed on dishonest words and images designed to manipulate consumers. Though expressed paternalistically, this is the institutional line gripping our minds.

What does all this have to do with NERR and recreation research? Well to begin, we are disciplined in both subject and behavior but, amidst chaos and insanity, what difference does it make? Are we applying our discipline in the service of the public or are we servants of an oligarchy? To what extent has the institutional grip seized our minds? Have we yielded our intellectual independence to the powers that be?

The institutional grip has impacted our fields in many ways. College and university programs have changed even more than W.H. Auden feared. Corporate largess shapes university priorities. Public education at all levels is being privatized, a dangerous development. Professors become entrepreneurs or migrant laborers. Students and parents pay more tuition and fees, making them sovereign consumers, "demanding economic value in return: entertainment, high grades, relevance, job preparation, certification for admission to professional schools" (Kernan, 1999:277). In the public land managing agencies this means more commercial activity, more marketing, and of course more revenue generation via fees. The "fee demonstration project" is the inevitable result of an oligarchy at work and a clear reflection of the institutional grip on both agency and individual minds. But it is more than that.

While Auden's poem has amused and taunted me for more than 30 years, Peter Berger's (1963) words have haunted me almost as long, and haunt me today. Berger, born in Austria, came to the US in his teens and served two years in the US Army. Later, at the height of the cold war and attendant arms race, he wrote about "sociological Machiavellianism" as follows: "As the physicists are busy engineering the world's annihilation, the social scientists can be entrusted with the smaller mission of engineering the world's consent" (p.152). This, he said, was not necessarily the result of unseemly purpose but perhaps having no purpose other than to serve the powers that be. The "fee demonstration project" is hardly about annihilation but is a clear example, a particularly egregious one, of engineering consent, in this case to pay without complaint another regressive tax. And it appears to serve the powers that be.

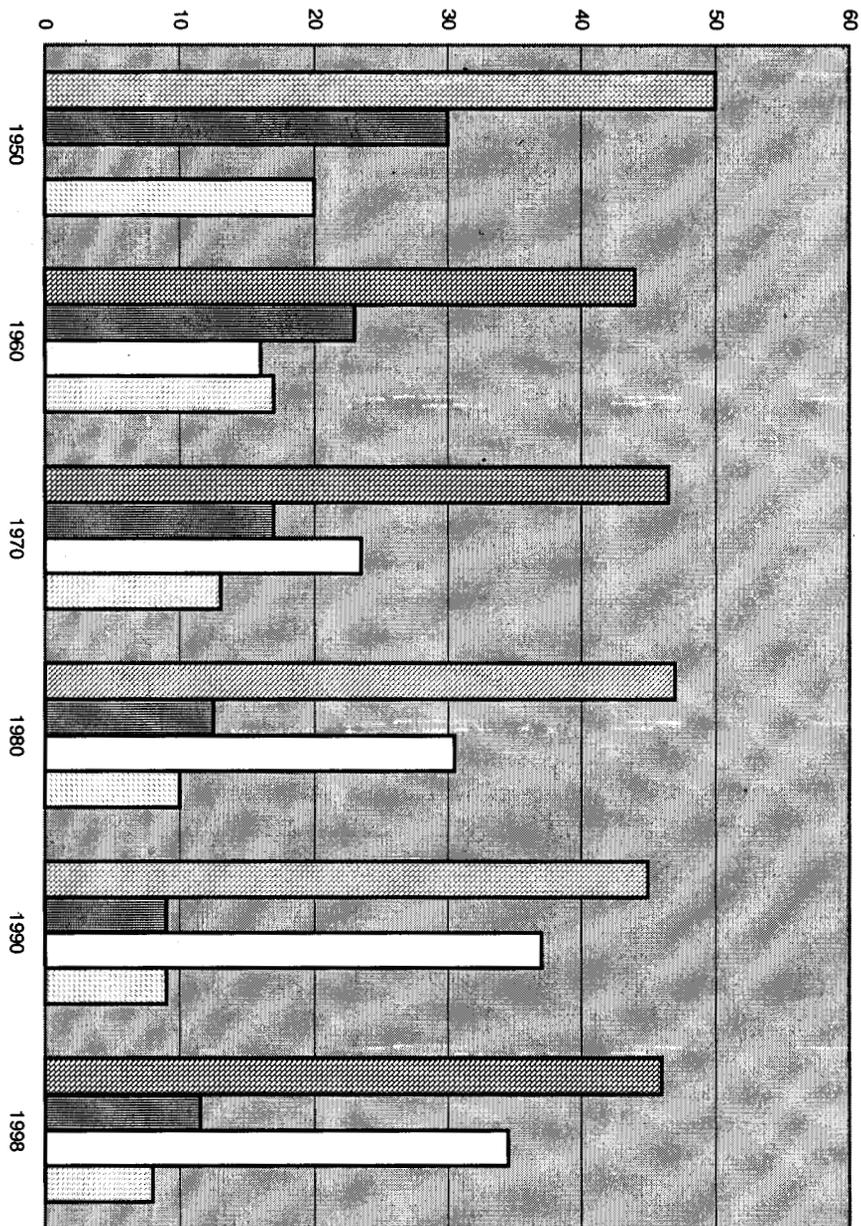
The actual charge to the agencies says thou shalt "demonstrate the feasibility of user generated cost recovery." "Demonstrate," not inquire into, not look for relationships, not sharpen researchable questions or testable hypotheses, not contribute to the development of theory -

i.e. not to do research but to engineer uncomplaining willingness to be taxed. That is very clear in several articles in the special issues of the Journal of Leisure Research (31:3, 1999) and Journal of Park and Recreation Administration (17:3, 1999) edited by Alan Watson. Alan expressed clearly his reservations about economics driving policy at the exclusion of all else, and about the proper role of scientists. Others were less squeamish. Let me cite (without attribution) one of dozens of examples. "Managers equipped with an understanding of the likely public response are better positioned to develop programs with a greater likelihood of acceptance and compliance."

Demonstrating the feasibility of user generated cost recovery is troublesome for many reasons. First, it compromises science and adds to the public's growing suspicion of science as self-serving and manipulative. Second, the premise that there is no money for maintenance, etc. is, quite simply, silly. George Bush's statement, "we have more will than wallet" could not have been more wrong. The exact opposite is true. The permanent government, the oligarchy, is all wallet and no will, at least no will to serve the public. Third, then, is the disconcerting realization that we may no longer be public servants in a democratic government. Fourth, demonstrating feasibility by ascertaining and then reshaping perceptions may engineer consent but should not be used in forming or rationalizing policy. Policy should be based on information and understanding. Suppose respondents' perceptions are not well informed? Should poorly informed perceptions be accorded any status at all, much used to form or rationalize policy?

Before answering questions about paying fees suppose respondents recalled that not long ago the permanent oligarchy in Washington, in a quiet display of raw power, gave away to their media brethren air-wave frequencies that should and could have been sold at auction for \$70 billion dollars. That single act added a thousand dollars to the tax burden of every family in America (Scheuen, 1988:44). Suppose we posed this question, "Which do you think is more fair, charging you \$1,000 in admission fees or charging giant corporations, those earnest champions of free markets, the free-market price for the right to use air-waves that belong to you and me?"

Federal Government Receipts - Percentages



Suppose respondents remembered that Allied-Signal Corporation sold a subsidiary for \$450 million and had a tax bill for \$150 million. Then accountants at Merrill Lynch figured out a scheme involving a foreign "partner" to help manipulate securities, interest rates, etc., effectively converting a \$150 million liability into a \$50 million tax-credit, thus evading \$200 million in taxes. That is only one company and only one swindle. Suppose respondents had just read that the IRS acknowledges being owed \$231 billion in back taxes and penalties. Suppose respondents converted that into \$10 per car entrance fees. Every family in America could have 10 free visits each year for the next 26 years.

Suppose respondents knew that corporate taxes, as a percent of total government receipts, have shrunk from 30% in 1950 to 11 ½% in 1998 (Statistical Abstract[s] of the United States). Suppose respondents knew of the parallel decline in the corporate share of local property tax revenue, from approximately 45% in 1970 to about 16% in 1990 (Reich, R. in D. Berliner and B. Biddle, 1995:85). The slight increase in the corporate share of federal receipts since 1990 is the result of unprecedented corporate earnings. Massive as they were, it appears they were underreported. Corporations capitalized a billion dollars or more are either lying to their shareholders or to the IRS. In 1992, for example, they reported income of \$420 billion to shareholders but only \$301 billion to the IRS, a difference of \$119 billion. A modest 28% tax on the amount not reported to the IRS pays the \$10 fee 10 times a year for every family in America for six years. And that's only a modest tax on only the unreported income and only for one year

Within the narrow confines of our field, our agency homes and our jobs, a little fee here and a small charge there can be made palatable by some social scientists applying some marketing tools. The engineering of consent is not annihilation but it is also not science and it is not public service. It is a reflection of the institutional grip of libertarian economics on a person's mind. Absent discovery of and resistance to that grip, discipline amidst chaos becomes the norm, and intellectual independence an even greater need.

One can commit a social science. Even psychologists are beginning to question those of their colleagues who sell their services to businesses that pitch products at young children. Is engineering willing consent to pay fees not also to be vigorously challenged? And while the gross inequities in the tax burden and gross disparities in wealth make this a particularly egregious example, the greater problem is using science for purposes not its own. The public's interests, I believe, can only be served by academics and public servants who maintain intellectual independence in the face of institutional powers that are more pervasive than we care to know or are ready to admit.

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