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Students of American urban politics who look beyond national boundaries immediately observe certain similarities in popular descriptions of American cities, and Great Britain as a whole. Both northeast and midwestern U.S. cities, and the entire British polity, are regularly portrayed as being in chronic "decline," and periodically portrayed as being in "crisis." One major consequence of this matched pair of afflicted political units is that both British and American cities have been early settings for the "politics of scarcity."

In this paper I will be reporting on some efforts at better understanding the types of response which decision-makers in the two societies use in responding to "decline" and "crisis," and some of the variations between the societies which affect their responses. In earlier work I have outlined a conceptual model of patterns of managerial response to budgetary stringency in American cities,¹ and examined data on how local governments in the two countries approach the budget-cutting task in practice.² In this paper I will be concentrating on variations in political culture between American and British urban governance, and the impact these variations have on urban public management.

In comparing top-level national administrators in the United States and Great Britain, Richard Neustadt argued that the British civil service was distinguished by a career structure which promoted the development of "generalists" with broad experience in administration, but also with detailed background work in the political sector as well.³ The career structures of the civil service provided opportunities to be confidential aides to government ministers without relinquishing civil service status. No such opportunity structures existed in American politics, Neustadt argued.

Thus, one fundamental facet of British public administration
is, in this view, leadership by a group of people who have worked with each other for long periods of time, share common values and experiences, but are not likely to be "technical experts." As such, the leadership of national British administration appears to fit with our standard understandings of the operation of British leadership patterns more generally. One of the "causes" of the British crisis, it is frequently argued, is societal undervaluing of technical expertise as opposed to more prestigious "generalist" training.  

By contrast, British local government is reported to have been considerably more interested than central government in encouraging its employees to obtain specific training in their own specialized fields. This pattern in British local government can hardly be explained by reference to the national "political culture." Indeed, British descriptions of British management patterns often emphasize the distinction between the national civil service and its traditions, and the very different recruitment patterns and traditions of local government service.  

The separateness of these traditions in the U.K. can be noted in the very language used to describe the respective institutions. In the United States, the term "civil service" covers all bureaucratic systems, from federal to local. In the U.K., however, "civil servants" work only for the national government. Comparable figures at subnational levels are "local government officers." One recent study of the "British philosophy of administration" explicitly excludes the operations of British local government from its purview.  

Any discussion of urban management in Britain, therefore, and any attempt to compare this system with American counterparts, must begin with two cautions. Administration in British local government cannot be inferred from observations drawn from national British experience, and variations within the patterns must be anticipated, even when only the local level is being considered. (In a very different context, Graham Allison has warned us of our
tendency to accept without question the existence of varied bureaucratic systems acting within our own country, but to begin our analyses of other societies with implicit assumptions of homogeneous national styles and purposes throughout that society's bureaucracy.\(^8\) Within the United States, the very complexity and variation in administrative procedures has been noted by one classic study of comparative administration to be the "focal point of American administrative dysfunctions."\(^9\)

Despite these caveats, there are certain regularities to British and American urban administration, and contrasts which can be drawn between them. In this paper I shall be outlining some of the variations between the settings in which American and British urban managers must operate. I am doing this in the context of a problem common to the two societies, pressures on their urban governments to curtail public spending.

Any discussion of this variation must begin by noting the variations between the two societies in public (and often elite) perceptions of the origins of the "crisis." As I mentioned above, an observer who compares the two countries is often struck by the similarities in the descriptions of the ailments of older American cities, on the one hand, and the entire British polity, on the other. While the complaints (and sometimes the suggested remedies) sound similar, their differing foci of attention produce different impacts on urban administration. In the American context, I have argued, much of the "urban crisis" is perceived to be distinctive to the particular communities undergoing the "crisis." Thus, newspaper commentary on the New York fiscal crisis (and much academic interpretation as well) pointed toward New York's distinctive municipal spending patterns.\(^10\) More recent analyses of Cleveland's difficulties have concentrated their attention on the personalities of particular individuals in the community political leadership structure.\(^11\)
Perceptions of crisis origins as peculiar to the community involved focus attention on the peculiarities of that community. In the case of New York, this led to national attention to the service mix of New York City, and comparisons of this service mix with that found in other large American cities. Certain features of New York City's spending and revenue-raising practices were widely perceived to be unique, and national government pressure was brought to bear to bring New York City "into line" with the range of services (and public employee benefits) found elsewhere. Managers in New York were not only under pressure to reduce their total expenditures, but were under rather explicit instructions about spending priorities as well, often from sources external to the city political structure.

The British case was different. Since the crisis itself is largely seen in national terms, there is little political incentive to seek out patterns of local distinctiveness. National efforts concentrate on overall spending control. While some discussion takes place about the spending priorities of local authorities (usually centering on housing expenditures), control of local government expenditure is but one element of a larger constellation of problems. In this larger universe, central government efforts to alter the priorities of individual local authorities inevitably take a secondary position.

Under such circumstances, we would expect local authorities in Britain, and those who manage their expenditures, to be "freer" to continue with their own spending priorities than would their American counterparts in "fiscal crisis" communities. Examination of changes in spending patterns in three London Boroughs, and comparison of these patterns with alterations of New York City's spending patterns, shows that this is indeed so.

Thus, the first major variation in American and British responses to urban fiscal stringency can be found in differences in perception of the "causes" of the crises. The pattern of perception found in Britain leaves its local public sector managers under less constraint than in the United States.
A second major variation between the two countries can be found in the differing ways in which urban public services are funded in the U.S. and Britain. I suggest that particular attention needs to be paid to the much greater reliance on central government "revenue sharing" in the U.K. than in the U.S. Douglas Ashford has shown that a much greater share of central government aid comes in unrestricted form in the U.K. than in the U.S.\textsuperscript{15} While the overall percentage of local expenditure which comes from central government sources is less in the U.S. than in the U.K.,\textsuperscript{16} this is probably not true for "fiscal crisis" central cities in the U.S., which have come to rely upon federal aid for disproportionately large shares of their revenues, in comparison with other American local governments.\textsuperscript{17}

In fact, a mere comparison of the available data on these points understates the difference. It is necessary to understand not only the extent to which unrestricted (as opposed to earmarked) national funds are available to local governments, but also the extent to which the provision of such funds has become routinized. The use of the Rate Support Grant has now become an accepted part of the British political process. This does not mean that no debate about it takes place, but rather that controversy centers around the funding formula, not the existence of the aid program itself.\textsuperscript{18} While central governments can and do alter the RSG formula for their own programmatic purposes, they really cannot control what local authorities do with the funds they receive, nor can central government credibly threaten to eliminate the payments.

In the United States, revenue sharing remains a new and uncertain program. As experiences with the Anti-Recession Fiscal Assistance Program demonstrate, local governments in the United States cannot be assured of comparable sums of federal assistance from one year to the next.\textsuperscript{19} Thus, not only is a greater proportion of central government aid in the U.S. in the form of program-specific grants, but even that portion of federal funding which is
unrestricted in nature comes under political circumstances which must make American urban administrators wary of relying too heavily on its continuation. This second variation in American and British patterns also suggests greater relative freedom for British urban administrators than would be true in the American situation.

A third variation can be found in the formal constitutional arrangements of the two societies. The amount of external control to which American urban managers are subject is enhanced by the American system. While it is of course true that Britain is a legally unitary system in which central government has sovereign powers over its municipalities while the American federal government does not, the role of state governments in the United States provides another setting for constraint to be imposed on American urban managers. State assertion of authority is by no means a purely theoretical matter. Longstanding political traditions in many American states (reinforced by cultural attitudes and the historical legacy of anti-urban apportionment patterns in state legislatures) lead to recurring state control of American local governments which are far more detailed than those exercised by British central government over British local authorities.

All of the variations described above are external to urban management itself. They are factors which influence the managerial environment, but they are not themselves the product of managerial attitudes. There is an additional set of Anglo-American variations, however, which is more directly attributable to differences in the position of and attitude toward management per se in the two societies.

One of the most crucial variations is the difference between Britain and the United States in the esteem with which private management is held. Criticisms of British private management are part of both the popular culture and much academic discussion of British societal difficulties. There is little underlying public belief, so widespread in the United States, that the private sector is somehow inherently more efficient than the public.
Thus, the notion that "business management can save the cities" is an unlikely political theme in Britain, but a regular part of both political rhetoric, and actual attempts at administrative implementation, in the United States. \(^\text{22}\)

This Anglo-American distinction has significant consequences for urban public sector managers. The "risk" of lateral importation of business figures into the public sector is far higher for American urban bureaucrats than is true in England. \(^\text{23}\) (Without entering the usually polemical debate over the informal influence of business "elites" on urban decision-making, it is clear that this possibility is far weaker in a society such as Britain, where the presuppositions which support such influence are much weaker. \(^\text{24}\) This does not suggest that such influence is nonexistent in Britain, only that from the perspective of public sector local government officials interested in "defending their turf," the risks of "intruders" are less.)

Just as cultural values about private and public sectors reinforce the relatively greater autonomy of British urban administrators in times of budgetary stringency, so too do the organizational arrangements of the administrators themselves. British administrators, organized into national bodies based on both technical skill and official qualifications, are far better defended than are American administrators, whose national links are weaker, and whose own careers may be more directly tied to the communities in which they serve. Lateral movement of ambitious American administrators is made difficult by the size of the country and the "anarchy" of urban recruitment systems. By contrast, British administrators' credentials will be honored throughout the country, and most promotional possibilities will be nationally advertised. Both legal barriers and political traditions make British urban administrators better insulated from reprisals by their own political superiors than would be true in many American cities. The necessity of keeping up positive relationships within any particular urban system should be less strong for a British administrator, therefore, than for an American one.
(This pattern of strong national professional associations is reinforced by the patterns of national public-sector collective bargaining in Britain. Absence of individual community collective bargaining in the U.K. removes a strain on relationships, particularly in times of budgetary stringency.)

These national patterns are rooted in the "specialist" nature of British local government administration. As I suggested earlier, local authority service varies considerably from the central government's civil service patterns. Recruitment and advancement within any particular sector of local government depends largely on the possession of the specific academic and technical qualifications of that policy area, and higher-level positions usually require prior local government experience. Such a career pattern, rooted more in the specialization itself than in the particular local government one is employed by, makes possible the type of lateral movement described above. 25

Equally importantly, it provides a "defense" of the specialization against the lateral entry of "unqualified" outsiders. As I indicated above, lateral entry of business figures into government is less likely in Britain than in the United States, because of the differing climates of national opinion about the relative efficiency of public and private sectors. Within Britain itself, entry of business figures is more likely into central government than into local authorities. 26 The "specialist" credentials so critical for local government advancement are unlikely to be possessed by any significant number of British business figures. 27 Thus, the structural arrangements of local government service reinforce the cultural values of the society, and both make local government officers in Britain better defended against outsiders than is true for urban bureaucrats in the United States.

What, then, can we anticipate to be the differences in managerial response to "fiscal crisis" in the two societies? I have elsewhere suggested a variety of different strategies which American urban administrators might use in dealing with fiscal stringency. 28 My central assumption was that chronic budgetary
shortages would not reduce managerial ambition. Indeed, once "budget crisis" came to be seen as a widespread phenomenon, ambitious managers might seek to "make a name" for themselves precisely by their abilities to manage under such circumstances. These descriptions were, however, rooted in American entrepreneurial traditions. I argued that such traditions, particularly in the private sector, could spill over into public policymaking in circumstances of fiscal stringency.

There are a number of reasons not to expect such responses to be as significant in British urban administration. As I suggested above, there are a number of reasons why British urban administrators are less likely to be under external pressure than their American counterparts, and they are better defended against such pressure if and when it occurs. In addition, the part-time nature of local government elected officials in Britain makes it unlikely that they can be serious rivals for the professionals in determining day-to-day administrative decisions. Weaker traditions of investigative reporting about local government, make less likely the type of expose which can weaken the independence and autonomy of American urban bureaucrats.

Thus, British urban administrators are able to remain more autonomous in determining priorities in response to fiscal crisis than American administrators are able to be. As a result, we should anticipate considerably less variation from status quo ante priorities in U.K. local government than in American. If local administrators in England are reasonably well protected against external control of their own decision-making, we should anticipate that they will also be less likely to alter their own standing decisions. American urban administrators, in cities with "fiscal crises," can expect to have all sorts of outsiders "looking over their shoulders" and evaluating their responses.

This external examination, in the American case, often begins with a presupposition that the origins of the problem can be found in the mistaken spending policies of the community involved, an attitude which must surely increase the severity of the external scrutiny. What is perhaps equally important, the more fluid
administrative structures of American cities makes possible the actual supplanting of administrators by outsiders believed to be more competent and "prudent."

In most of the literature on governmental budgeting only incremental changes from the previous year's budgets are reported. One of the major explanations of the utility of this type of decision-making is that it eases the burdens on administrative decision-makers. Environments of budgetary stringency do challenge some of the assumptions upon which that standard view is based. When we examine how administrators behave, we need to consider not only the internal administrative advantages of adhering closely to the status quo ante, but also the extent to which administrators see themselves to be free from or constrained by external pressure to change priorities. It has been the argument of this paper that British urban administrators have greater autonomy under these circumstances than is true in the United States, and examination of budgetary data from the largest cities in the two countries tends to confirm this view.

I should mention that internal British analyses have argued from somewhat different perspectives. Most commentary emphasizes the growing constraint on British local government. This constraint is depicted in two rather different ways. One type of analysis puts primary emphasis on increases in direct central government control of British local authorities. Particular attention is called to the use of "cash limits," in which central government aid programs have ceilings placed upon them in any given fiscal year, and the usual adjustments for inflation are not a basis for upward changes in aid amounts. Changes in the Rate Support Grant formula itself gives central government a considerable weapon to use against recalcitrant local authorities.

But despite these real constraints, it has been the argument of this paper that British local authorities have retained relatively greater freedom than American "fiscal crisis" cities, and have retained relatively greater ability to control their own priority-setting, within the limits of central government aid.
Despite government indications of displeasure, local authorities have retained full ability to raise additional revenue on their own, if they are willing to accept the political costs of raising their own property taxes.\(^3\)

In addition to emphasizing the role of direct central government constraints, many British analysts have directed their attention to the perceived growth of "corporatism," and have argued that this too constitutes a growing limit on the freedom of decision of local governments, and those who manage them. The concept of "corporatism," usually used in a pejorative context, suggests that tripartite arrangements of government, big business, and large labor unions in fact take collective decisions on major points in the national economy.\(^4\) Since local government expenditure is such a point, it too is subject to the influence of corporatism.

Whatever the merits of this view, there is no inherent reason why the growth of collective decision-making across a variety of governmental and industrial sectors necessarily reduces the autonomy of local government vis a vis central government. If such patterns do indeed grow, and this itself is by no means certain, the relative power of all levels of government as independent "sovereign" powers might be reduced, however.

The growth of concern about corporatism, and its possible risks for democratic decision-making, fit a more widespread pattern of critical analyses of British political systems. This changing trend can be observed in American analyses of Britain as well. Long-standing trends in American political discussion have presented British experiences as models to be emulated.\(^5\) Samuel Huntington has suggested that this pattern of emulation can be traced back to the origins of the American republic.\(^6\)

More recently, however, the British experience has been presented as a model to be avoided. One early sign of this changing fashion can be found in the generally cool analyses of British urban reorganizations as possible models for American cities.\(^7\) More recent commentary has centered on British difficulties
in maintaining a wide range of urban public services. 38

The argument of this paper has been somewhat different. I have suggested that local government elites in Britain have been better able to retain freedom of choice in setting local government priorities than have some comparable American actors, but I have attributed these differences to variations in both the structural setting of British local government, and more broadly cultural attitudes about business and government in the U.K.

Whether this is a good thing or a bad thing depends on one's perspective about the policy outputs of the local governments involved. It does suggest, however, that the formal centralism of British government has not resulted in the elimination of local government autonomy, even under circumstances of severe fiscal stringency.
Notes


5. Brian Smith and Jeffrey Stanyer, Administering Britain (London: Martin Robertson, 1976) p. 188

6. B. Smith and J. Stanyer, op. cit. p. 178
   Simon Caulkin, "The Other Civil Service," Management Today (Feb. 1978) p. 49
   Neville Abraham, Big Business and Government (London: Macmillan, 1974) p. 300


   B. Smith and J. Stanyer, op. cit. p. 176


11. Thus, Cleveland default problems are described as attributes of political and personality conflicts between the Mayor and banking and utility executives in the city.


16. loc. cit.

   *Sunday Telegraph*, 6 February, 1977, p. 6
   Edward Page, "Why Should Central-Local Relations in Scotland Be Any Different from those in England?" *Studies in Public Policy* No. 21, Centre for the Study of Public Policy, University of Strathclyde, p. 31

19. Extension of the Anti-Recession Fiscal Assistance program failed on the final day of the 1978 Congressional session, after many large cities had already budgeted on an assumption of its extension.

   Ghita Ionescu, op. cit. p. 85

21. It is hard to imagine Anthony Downs, *Inside Bureaucracy*, with its argument of the efficiency advantages of market-oriented organizations, being written in the British context.


25. Simon Caulkin, op. cit. p. 49
   Neville Abraham, Big Business and Government, op. cit. pp. 297-8

26. Graham Wootton, op. cit. p. 193
   Neville Abraham, op. cit. p. 299

27. Abraham, op. cit. p. 300


33. Which? (April, 1978) p. 312

Guardian, 16 December, 1977. Minister of the Environment Peter Shore, in announcing that "local government spending is now under control," stated that, "I am imposing no limit on the kind of rate increases they (local councils) may wish to, or have to make. It's for them to decide on the value of their services."

34. Wootton, op. cit. p. 194

Rose and Peters, op. cit. p. 190


35. For a classic example, see, American Political Science Association, Committee on Political Parties, "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System, American Political Science Review, Vol. XLIV, No. 3, Part 2 (Sept. 1950)

