

[POINT OF VIEW]

Finding the Deeper Layers

BY MATTHEW MAZZOTTA



BC Law 2008 Rappaport Fellows from left to right: Matthew Mazzotta and Julia Kobick worked together in the Office of the Governor's Legal Counsel for Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick; Elizabeth Monnin-Browder focused on health care issues in Attorney General Martha Coakley's office; and Eric Batcho worked at the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection.

ONE WARM WEDNESDAY EVENING LAST SUMMER, I sat on the steps of the institute of Contemporary Art looking out over the South Boston' Waterfront. Boats cruised in and out of the harbor while joggers ran back and forth in front of me on newly completed portions of the Harborwalk. All around were signs of the new Boston, from the Harborwalk and the ICA, to the Moakley Federal Courthouse, the Harbor Tunnels, and Piers Park in East Boston across the water.

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Those buildings and public spaces were the reason I was there that night. I was one of twenty-four students in the Rappaport Fellows program, a pair of dual fellowships run by the Rappaport Center for Law and Public Service at Suffolk University Law School and the Rappaport Center for Greater Boston at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government.

Our guest speaker that evening was a former Massachusetts Assistant Secretary of Environmental Affairs. Sitting on the steps of the ICA, he told us the stories behind each of those new signs of Boston—stories involving political wrangling, development deals gone right and wrong, lawsuits, community activism, and, of course, complex permitting processes. As a former journalist, I knew some of that history. I had covered many of the stories of Boston recent revitalization as they happened, from sharp-elbowed battles over the Big Dig and development of the South Boston' Waterfront, to celebrated moments such as the opening of the Zakim Bridge and the tearing down of the elevated expressway. But on that Wednesday night, I was reminded of how little I knew.

The gloss of media coverage and sound bites only takes you so far. There are always deeper layers, with more complex relationships and interplays than appear on the surface. I was also reminded of something my criminal law professor, Sharon Beckman, said to her students early in the semester 1L year: "Law is not something that is; it is something that is in the process of becoming." Boston is not something that is; it is in the process of becoming.

Like the city around us, the students gathered on those steps were also in the process of becoming. The central insight of the Rappaport program is to take young people in the process of becoming and expose them to public service because it will enrich their perspectives and their communities no matter where their careers take them. The program immerses twelve law students and twelve graduate students from Boston area schools in public service by helping them get public interest jobs for the summer and having them meet once a week with community leaders and activists to learn about the often complex relationship between law and public policy.

Sitting around me were students from a wide variety of backgrounds, including former scientists, health care workers, teachers, legislative aids-even the youngest selectman in Massachusetts. Our interests and summer jobs were diverse too, from my job tackling statewide policy matters in the Office of the Governor's Legal Counsel, to others' work assisting in wetlands permitting at the Department of Environmental Protection, developing broadband internet initiatives in the Department of Telecommunications and Cable, and drafting community benefits guidelines for HMOs and hospitals in the Attorney General's Office.

What brought us together was the common fact that we were all in school working towards degrees that would take us somewhere new in life. Most of us envisioned careers that would somehow help shape and define our communities, even if we weren't exactly sure what those careers would be. For some, their summer job and the Rappaport Fellowship was a starting point. For others, it was a way station in an ongoing journey. But for one night at least, there was time to take a break from the process of becoming and enjoy some interesting stories, a beautiful sunset, and then a stroll for a pint at the Barking Crab.

Matthew Mazzotta is a former television news producer for NECN (New England Cable News).

(Boston College Law Magazine Fall/Winter 2008)