Nostalgia for quieter times

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Clean desk. First day of new semester.
   I’m reading Epictetus.
My office mate and students pester
   my focus on the treatise.

Through Red Sox banter I’ve been learning
   it’s hard to keep my poise–
I never took that course concerning
   the signal and the noise.

Those days I didn’t think imprudent
   to make a minor riot,
but then I was a graduate student:
   my office was too quiet.

Whispers unraveled in Urbana
   like one continued fraction:
that was the Pax Americana
   I lost to this distraction.

Instead of “let \( n \) be a number,”
   these voices rattle “Papi.”
I may look stoic in my slumber
   but I’m not very happy.

Perhaps there’s wisdom on these pages
   on how to tune out chatter.
I miss your silence as mine rages,
   beloved Alma Mater.