

*Although certainly not mainstream to the study of public administration, administrative history in the United States has quite a tradition. In this article, the development of the study of the history of American government is traced in five phases and discussed against the background of political and social change in society. The various studies are evaluated in terms of the themes, the nature, and the approach. Combining the "history as history" and the "history as advocacy" approaches would clarify why administrative history ought to be a standard element in our research and teaching.*

## **ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES**

### *Development and State of the Art*

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What we have inherited is what we have selected, which means what we have not chose to disregard.

—S. E. Finer (1997, p. 385)

The first, and great desideratum of history, is truth; the second, just reflections on it.

—James Fennimore Cooper (1839; as quoted in White, 1954, p. ix)

### **1. INTRODUCTION: DOMINANT AND DORMANT FOUNDATIONS**

For a country in which people at large are believed to be so much oriented on the present, and even more, on progress and the future, it is remarkable to see how much interest there is in the United States for general history (the highlights as presented by the History Channel) and for personal history (e.g., the growth of genealogy). More specifically, among social scientists the interest in history is slowly (and surely?) increasing,



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and administrative history or the history of government is one of the growth areas. With respect to administrative history, stereotype has it that the study of public administration is and ought to be concerned with developing usable knowledge surfacing in a problem-solving mind-set. Research in the past 10 to 15 years refutes that stereotype, for judging by the growing number of monographs and articles, administrative history appears to draw more attention (for some figures on the development of articles on administrative history in the 1973 to 1992 period, see Raadschelders, 1998b, p. 28). Whether this observation tells more about my hopes for the future place of administrative history in mainstream public administration (after all, few textbooks to date provide little historical context) or whether it is actually true cannot really be appreciated until a few decades from now. In this article, I will make the case that the administrative history of the United States has quite a tradition, one of at least a century, which is about as early as when this avenue of research emerged in Europe. In fact, Americans were among the first to recognize the importance of a systematic study of administrative history. The two main questions addressed in this article are the following:

1. What body of knowledge is available from which we can draw and expand? and
2. How has the political and social environment (the *Zeitgeist*) influenced the study of administrative history of the United States?

Combining the first and second questions, we will not only recognize the gaps in our knowledge, but—just as important—we will also see how the development of particular themes within this field of research was highly related to specific time contexts. The historiography of administrative history of the United States could not be understood if not explicitly linked to the dominating political and social environment of the various periods. The same is true, of course, for any other country, but state-of-the-art articles on the administrative history of specific countries usually do not pay much, if any, attention to the second question (Raadschelders, 1998b, p. 4). With respect to this second question, *Finer's* recent remark, quoted at the opening of this article, is very pertinent in general and

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exceptionally relevant to the United States for there is a dominant and a dormant foundation of administrative history the roots of which go back to the pre-Revolutionary era and the early years of American independence. The Federalist-statist approach to government and society, and thus to administrative history, has been the dominant one. The Anti-Federalist-communal appreciation of society and government, on the other hand, was dormant for most of the past two centuries. It was strong, though, in the 1770s to 1790s debate about how to constitute the government of an independent America; strong in the early reform decades of the 1880s to 1900s when attention, appreciation, and probably nostalgia about the happy communal past in the late colonial years briefly surfaced; and again emerging in the 1990s with renewed attention for the development of the discourse of administrative thought.

This article is organized around the five distinct periods (one of which has two subperiods) that I distinguish in the development of this country's administrative history. For each of these periods, I will briefly outline and characterize (sections 3 to 7) the following:

- the dominant approach to history,
- the time context (i.e., Federalist-statist, or Anti-Federalist and communal),
- the major themes in administrative history, and
- the major authors.

In the eighth section, I will summarize the argument thus far (i.e., the state of the art) and will then discuss in more detail the cognitive goals and levels of analysis characteristic for the American research in this field. One final remark: This article is only concerned with the administrative history of the United States and will not cover the work of those American scholars who have made substantial contributions to the administrative history of other countries such as Russia, Prussia, Japan, and so forth. Before embarking on this endeavor, it is instructive to discuss briefly early calls for an administrative history of the United States.

## **2. EARLY SUPPORT FOR ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES**

The Americans may very well be among the first nations that advocated the study of government and administration independent from the study of political theory. The history of government had never been an

interest in Europe, and if there was it was always as part of the general interest in (the development of) political theory in relation to a country's political circumstances. Political theory developed often as a justification of past events in the *histoire événementiel* (e.g., Macchiavelli, Jean Bodin, Johann Althusius, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke) or as a perceptive understanding of social change in the air (e.g., Condorcet, De Tocqueville, John Stuart Mill). Either way, history served as a guide in the present. But, of course, this could not be defined as administrative history. From the onset of their independence, the Americans proved to be different.

The founding fathers displayed a major interest and mastery in political theory as well as in the practice of government. In several places, *The Federalist Papers* (Hamilton, Madison, & Jay, 1982) looked at the past experience with European monarchical and republican governments (especially, England, France, and the Netherlands). Few contemporaries in the young American republic were not aware that they had started an experiment. In fact, theirs was the promising New World, to be shaped not by historical circumstance, aristocrats, and/or the proximity of aggressive neighbors but by intelligent and benevolent citizens operating on the basis of mutual respect, equality, and consensus. Being aware of the magnitude of the experiment, it is *not* surprising that the earliest call for an administrative history dates from that period. The following words spoken in 1786 by Surgeon General Benjamin Rush need no further comment: "The science of government, whether it relates to constitutions or laws, can only be advanced by a careful selection of facts, and these are to be found chiefly in History" (Kammen, 1987, p. 53). Twenty years later, New Hampshire Senator William Plumer wrote in his diary on July 22, 1806,

I have for some time wished to see a full and impartial history of the government of the United States. . . . A history of the administration of our government, its laws—of the presidents—heads of departments . . . would, if well executed, be a very useful work. (Quoted in White, 1951, p. vii)

He hoped for too much, because what limited attention administrative history received was in the context of a discussion of political and diplomatic affairs (White, 1951, p. ix). More than three decades later, the American President William Henry Harrison spoke the following words in his inaugural address (March 4, 1841):

Upward of half a century has elapsed since the adoption of the present form of government. It would be an object more highly desirable than the curiosity of speculative statesmen if its precise situation could be ascertained, a

fair exhibit made of the operations of each of its departments, of the powers which they respectively claim and exercise, of the collisions which have occurred between them or between the whole Government and those of the States or either of them. (Quoted in White, 1954, p. viii)

According to White (1954), this challenge was coveted by Harrison's secretary of state and the great orator of his age, Daniel Webster, but impossible to realize because "the burden of office became an insuperable barrier" (p. viii). More than a century after Harrison, the first more or less integral administrative history of the United States would be written covering the period 1789 to 1901 (see section 5). The writing of administrative history started much earlier, though.

### 3. THE ERA OF HISTORICISM, 1820s TO 1880s

By the middle of the 19th century, the study of history in Europe had professionalized under the influence of Leopold von Ranke. Historical scholarship involved the collection of hard facts, presenting them in chronological order so that the past would speak for itself. Studying the past involved no interpretation. It was objective. One could study the past as an impartial observer. Throughout the 19th century, American interest in the history of government in general and that of the United States in particular was defined as one of political, constitutional, and institutional history that naturally included attention for the colonial period. Authors as early as Pitkin (1828) and later Willson (1863) and Landon (1889) are good examples of this approach. The first American author to write an administrative history was Augustine J. H. Duganne (1860), and the dedication of his study reflected the contemporary belief in objectivity: "All doctrinal views of political, social, or religious questions have been carefully avoided in these pages, which are respectfully dedicated to the people of our Union." His book was a history of government in the world, with about one sixth of its pages devoted to American government. These, however, were not so much an administrative history of the United States but rather descriptions of the structures of federal government and of the governments of the then-33 states. Although Duganne is thus not the earliest scholar to write on administrative history of (parts of) the U.S. government, he is included as an illustration of the mid-19th-century approach to history and—more important—because his framework is no different than that of some authors at later stages (see sections 4 and 5). His framework of reference was befitting of the times. It was evolutionary (description of

development of government in stages by using biological analogy) and progressive (strong belief in progress); it embraced a secular notion of the American nation; and it emphasized the values of individualism and equality (Raadschelders, 1997, pp. 475-482). As far as I know, the academic study of history in the United States was detached from day-to-day politics. Before the 1870s, academics did not have any significant public influence to speak of (Hofstadter, 1955, p. 153). Although Duganne wrote his book in a style and format that appears to have been targeted for high school teachers and students, I have no knowledge as to whether it was used as such. There is a little evidence that his work attracted attention from some in political office, but that it actually had any influence on policy may be doubted. In comparison to academic authors, the only thing that was peculiar of Duganne's book was the title. In terms of substance, it compared very well with studies of professed academics.

#### **4. THE OLD RURAL AND THE NEW URBAN PROGRESSIVISM, 1880s TO 1930s**

The study of public administration started (in the United States) or was revived (as in Germany and the Netherlands) as local government studies for pretty much the same reasons: industrialization, population growth, urbanization, reform of public health, strive for efficiency, and so forth. The Americans were also—if not more so—interested in weeding out corruption. To that effect, American civil servants like Dorman Eaton and scholars like Woodrow Wilson (Martin, 1987, 1988; Miewald, 1984, 1994) went or were sent to Europe for inspiration and called for civil service reform and a separation of politics and administration. Also, the growth of local government in the United States made Americans look at the comparable European developments basically because the Europeans had centuries of experience with local government and its changes (Hofstadter, 1955, p. 175).

What distinguished earlier American authors writing about the history of government from those in the later part of the century was that the latter had more, although still limited, attention for the daily practice of government. Administrative history was now identified as the history of the polity, more specifically as the history of government in society. The main subject, however, was still very much that of political, constitutional, and institutional history. Woodrow Wilson's (1889/1892) work is a good example of that. In his view,

our own institutions can be understood and appreciated only by those who know somewhat familiarly other systems of government and the main facts of general institutional history. By the use of a thorough comparative and historical method, moreover, a general clarification of views may be obtained. (p. xxxv)

This appreciation for the comparative and historical approach is not particularly new. Both *The Federalist Papers* (Hamilton et al., 1982) and the *Anti-Federalist Papers* (Ketcham, 1986) frequently refer to European civilizations in the present and the past to flesh out the distinct American conception of governance. Wilson's (1889/1892) outlook on government was very much in tune with the late-19th-century pragmatic beliefs that considered "government [a]s merely the executive organ of society" (p. 598). He also understood politics and administration to be two sides of one and the same coin: "Legislation and administration ought under every well-devised system to go hand in hand. Laws must receive test of their wisdom and feasibility at the hands of administration: administration must take its energy and its policy from legislation" (p. 591). For a long time, and especially in ancient Greek and Roman governments, he assumed that society and government were one, defined in organic relation to one another. What made the government of his day different was that "the modern State has been largely *de-socialized*. The modern idea is this: the state no longer absorbs the individual; it only serves him: the state, as it appears in its organ, the government, is the representative of the individual" (p. 645).

There are two reasons why I pay a little extra attention to Woodrow Wilson. The first is that it is almost astonishing to see how much his 1887 article dominates our impression and knowledge of him, whereas his main body of scholarly work before the turn of the century amounts to hundreds and hundreds of pages on the history of government in the Western world. The conviction that contemporary government could only be understood in a combined cross-time and cross-national perspective was one Duganne also embraced, although Wilson was unaware of that: "So far as I have been able to ascertain, no textbook of like scope and purpose has hitherto been attempted" (Wilson, 1889/1892, p. xxxiv). Wilson's interest and approach designates him as one of the leading early scholars of the administrative history of the United States. His 1889 study had at least two more editions (1892, 1898), and the section in that study about the United States was published as a separate volume in 1891 for classroom purposes. The second is that his approach to administrative history in the

1880s and 1890s reflects two different strands of thought within what was known as Progressivism, as I will outline below.

The Progressive era was fundamental to the development of American government in the 20th century, the major challenge being to create a less corrupt and more responsive government, a government that could deal with the pressures and social problems created by urbanization, industrialization, and population growth. There was consensus about the kind of reform needed but little as to where that reform should be “organized.” There were two camps that Barry Dean Karl (1983) labeled as the old and new Progressivism:

The traditional practices of local American democracy—the town meetings and local political party organizations that assumed common agreement on the methods and purposes of governing—functioned differently in the backrooms of urban politics. . . . The circumstances that crowded [small town Americans] in the cities seemed to isolate them in spirit; for them there was no urban organization to supply the authority of the old communities. They remembered an agrarian past more idyllic than it had really been, and they grew increasingly fearful of the decline in participatory democracy. . . . The old reformers had sought to expand democracy; the new sought to preserve it within limits now imposed by science and technology. (p. 17)

The old Progressivists selectively remembered the wonderful colonial times when government was believed to be grounded in communal action. It will come as no surprise that an enormous number of studies on colonial government at the state and local level were published in the 1880s and 1890s (e.g., Freeman, 1882). Many of these appeared in the Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science (since 1882). This project of at least 8 years was facilitated by Henry Baxter Adams who—once back from his study in Germany—developed a large program that adopted a comparative approach to the study of institutional change (Fiske, 1890/1903, p. xiii; Hofstadter, 1968, pp. 38-39). This subject would continue to attract attention in subsequent decades (Andrews, 1904; Coleman 1935; Dickerson, 1912; Karraker, 1930; MacLeod, 1924; Munro, 1920; Shambaugh, 1938) while the constitutional and institutional approach in which the colonial period played a prominent role continued to attract scholars (Andrews, 1908; Von Holst, 1877-1892; Wilson, 1891, 1889/1892).

The old Progressivist spirit was carried to its fullest expression by Mary Parker Follett (1918/1920) who, in her convincing and direct style, argued that in their conception of government the American people



believed it to be machine made rather than man made (p. 335). As a consequence, democracy was considered a goal, the steps toward it to be designed and engineered (pp. 99, 157). Instead, she emphasized democracy as a continuous process of interaction between individuals in an organic society. This is quite comparable to Woodrow Wilson's advocacy for "participatory administration" and an organic "government by discussion" (Davidson, 1956, p. 454; Miewald, 1984, p. 26; Wilson, 1889/1892, pp. 598, 609). To Follett (1918/1920), each individual was the complete expression of the whole, a state impossible for the parts of a physical organism (p. 77). To her, the growth of democracy was synonymous to the growth of individualism (p. 171) in association with one another: "Association is the impulse at the core of our being. The whole social process is that of association, individual with individual, group with group. Progress from one point of view is a continuously widening of the area of association" (p. 193). Her ideal organization of government was neighborhood association in which politics and policy were the product of continuous interaction: "The interweaving of desire, not the domination of the desires of the strongest, should be the social process; the service of law is to help find those methods by which desires shall more and more fruitfully interweave" (Follett, 1924, p. 270). The sentiments of this strand of Progressivism were reminiscent of the Anti-Federalist opposition to the new Constitution a century earlier and of the sentiments of the Populists who have been labeled as the first modern political movement in the United States to advocate government responsibility for the common good (Hofstadter, 1955, p. 61). Populism, going back to the Jacksonian period, would merge with Progressivism at the turn of the century (Hofstadter, 1955, p. 133), which is why Progressivism at heart embraced two different "cultures": that of a "soft" politics of the rural countryside and that of an urban economic politics. Even though it was not quite in line with his social and educational background, in later years Woodrow Wilson would every now and then embrace the populist conception of democracy, for instance when he said in 1913 that the Democratic party should work at setting up

a government in the world where the average man, the plain man, the common man, the ignorant man, the unaccomplished man, the poor man had a voice equal to the voice of anybody else in the settlement of common affairs. (Quoted in Hofstadter, 1955, p. 262)

Thus, the old, rural soul could be found side by side with the new urban spirit. These new Progressivists advocated reform through enhancing the

efficiency of government functioning and the strengthening of the executive at the federal level to establish a positive, administrative state (Arnold, 1995, p. 409). This growth of federal government fairly quickly resulted in administrative history studies in which the organization, policies, civil service reform, and high offices of the federal level were central (Fabricant, 1952; Hatch, 1934; Mansfield, 1939; Sageser, 1935; Schneider, 1938; Sharp, 1927; Short, 1923a, 1923b; Stewart, 1929, 1950; Woody, 1934).

The arguments of the new Progressivists were more in line with what the Federalists had envisioned. Thus, the challenges confronting the local up to the federal government in the late-19th, early-20th centuries prompted two different responses: the old Progressivists seeking reform through a revival of communitarianism and the new Progressivists seeking refuge in increased federal regulation and power. The latter won the day. Follett's call for grassroots government based on group organization and organic process was already outdated at the moment of its publication and drowned in the spirit of scientific management that permeated American business and government from the beginning of the century. The historians Frederick Jackson Turner, Charles A. Beard, and Vernon L. Parrington played an influential role. Recognizing that the West had been won, Turner realized that America needed a different government:

Organized democracy after the era of free land has learned that popular government to be successful must not only legitimately be the choice of the whole people [but must recognize that] specialization of the organs of government, the choice of the fit and the capable for office, is quite as important as the extension of popular control. (Quoted in Hofstadter, 1968, p. 127)

By his own admission, Woodrow Wilson was very much inspired by Turner (Hofstadter, 1968, p. 61), and that is what makes him more a new than an old Progressivist. This government as organized democracy was quite different from what Follett would passionately defend more than 20 years later. The new Progressivists' sense of history was also quite different:

The liberal bourgeois version of the economic interpretation of history seemed to promise that, with the increasing accumulation of capital and the increasing development of a social surplus over the bare needs of the population, the material foundations would be laid for further social and moral progress along the lines then being advocated by many reformers. (Hofstadter, 1968, p. 200)

History was progress toward democracy in a stratified and elitist society, as the following quote from Beard illustrates:

No student of politics today will attempt to lay down dogmatically what government in all times and places should undertake to do, for he realizes that what government does in practice depends not upon any theory about its proper functions, but upon the will of a group of persons actually in control at any one time or upon the equilibrium that is established through conflicts among groups seeking to control government. (Quoted in Hofstadter, 1968, pp. 188-189)

The new Progressivists implicitly (like Woodrow Wilson) or explicitly (like Beard) criticized the founding fathers for having been opportunistic when drafting the constitution. Beard's economic interpretation of history was not as new but more aggressive, as the following words of Wilson (1893/1898) illustrate:

The federal government was not by intention a democratic government. In plan and structure it had been meant to check the sweep and power of popular majorities. . . . The government had, in fact, been originated and organized upon the initiative and primarily in the interest of the mercantile and wealthy classes. (p. 12)

But their conception of government was as much elitist as that of the Federalists a century earlier. Beard had reorganized the Political Science Department at Columbia and was involved as a consultant with the New York Bureau of Municipal Research that either became the Training School for Public Service (TSPS) in the National Institute of Public Administration (Gulick, 1990, p. 601) or that established the TSPS as a subsidiary organization (Pugh, 1985, p. 475). The TSPS has also been described as a part of the University of Columbia (Karl, 1963, p. 137). The core courses in the TSPS curriculum relied heavily on historical and descriptive studies (McSwite, 1997, p. 161). One of Beard's students was Luther Gulick, whose interpretation of the historical method left no doubt about his approach to government:

a force for continuity and conservation which revealed in the past the logical and rational basis of present rational designs and future logical directions. Continuities which could be traced from 1631 to 1917 seemed to show that . . . man's intelligence brought him to the most appropriate solutions to his economic and political problems. (Quoted in Karl, 1963, p. 153)

Gulick appears here to argue in a path-dependent manner *avant-la-lettre*. What is more important in the context of this article, though, is the fact that Beard and Gulick, together with scholars such as Leonard White and William Mosher, created the American Society for Public Administration in 1939 (Pugh, 1990, pp. 267-268). By that time, the administrative management approach was firmly embedded in the public administration community if only because “the reformers were no longer above or outside of public administration, they were inside. They were administrators, not politicians and/or academicians interested in administrative questions” (Martin, 1988, p. 634).

### **5. THE PROMISE OF RATIONALISM, 1930s TO 1970**

From the early 1900s on, business administration came to wield more and more influence over public administration. In the first decade, the number of business management books rose sharply, and businessmen enthusiastically adopted Taylor’s efficiency creed. In the midst of this outburst of rationalism, the Progressivists were increasingly worried about the consequences of naked materialism and feared private power much more than public power. The Progressivists wanted federal government regulation to reform business and restore competition on one hand and minimize the exploitation of labor on the other (Hofstadter, 1955, pp. 231, 238). The influence of business, though, was not just in the concentration of wealth. With respect to government, business influence was visible in the adoption of managerial principles developed in a private sector context. The ideal of good administration gave way to the idea of businesslike administration at first at the local and state level and after the First World War also rapidly at the federal level. However, as early as 1887, Woodrow Wilson already wrote that government “should make its business less unbusinesslike” and that administrative questions were “merely instrumental” (quoted in Stillman, 1992, pp. 8, 11).

The administrative history in these years reflected the attention for managerial principles. The representative study for the period is the four-volume administrative history of the United States by Leonard White, published between 1948 and 1958. One of the opening sentences in the first volume could not have been more fitting: “My principal interest has been to explore the origin and growth of the opinions that Americans

now possess about public management” (White, 1948, p. vii). White’s focus throughout was on the PODSCORB-principles identified by Gulick a decade earlier. It would be wrong to say, though, that the scholars laboring on the administrative history of the United States were totally focused on the management angle. In fact, that was not the case.

The early post–Second World War years were very favorable to administrative history. White (1948) mentioned how the Public Administration Committee of the Social Science Research Council had established a subcommittee on administrative history (p. ix). A student of White and encouraged by him, Van Riper (1958) wrote his Ph.D. study on the U.S. civil service. This is a good example of a more interpretative tradition that had its roots in a political theory approach. Karl (1976), quoted earlier, is another excellent example, as are Caldwell (1944, 1976) (who also was a student of White’s) and Nash (1969). Nash’s 1969 study was commissioned by Dwight Waldo, who knew him as a student and research assistant (Waldo, 1984, p. lx, note 13). Although Waldo never extensively “wrote” administrative history, he did study it for better understanding of the American government (Waldo, 1948/1987, p. 101). The same can be said of Robert Dahl (1947), who argued that the study of public administration should not rest on “a narrowly defined knowledge of techniques and process, but rather extending to the varying historical, sociological, economic and other conditioning factors” (p. 11). In other words, there was considerable counterweight to the purely managerial approach toward public administration.

Concessions were made, though, for the historical approach had to contribute to administrative problem solving (Caldwell, 1955, p. 458). Administrative history had to result in usable knowledge, objective and based on hard facts. The academic goal was to develop middle-range rather than grand theories. The applied goal was to develop case studies from which policy and decision makers could profit. After all, it was believed that the past offered practical lessons for the present in the sense that certain facts will happen again and that one should draw on experience rather than reinvent the wheel (Caldwell, 1955, p. 454). The efforts of Neustadt and May (1986) at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard to develop a course for professionals on the basis of case studies is a good example.

In terms of productivity, the postwar years witnessed a growth of studies as well as a broadening of the themes the most important of which were nation building; budget, public finance, and taxes; state and local government

reform; civil service reform; policy areas; and, especially in the 1960s, an interest for nation building in itself (e.g., Lipset, 1963; Merritt, 1966).

From the 1960s to the 1990s, budget, public finance, and taxes would attract much attention. The study of Webber and Wildavsky (1986) stands out both for its comprehensiveness as well as its scope. Even though it is a history of public budgeting of the Western world, it is mentioned here because of the attention given to the United States. There are several other studies, and these are mostly limited to the 20th century such as by Benson, Benson, and McClelland (1965) on the property tax, Berman (1979) on the Office of Management and Budget, Borchering (1977) on public expenditure, and McCaffery (1987) and Wildavsky (1987) on the development of public budgeting. Ferguson (1961) focused on late-18th-century budgeting. An unusual study on the expenditure control by Congress was published by Wilmerding (1943).

A third subject of interest was state and local government and especially the decades of reform around the turn of the century. With the exception of some early studies (Griffith, 1927; Stewart, 1950), most were published in the 1970s and 1980s (Fesler, 1967; Fox, 1977; Griffith, 1972, 1974; Pease, 1971; Rice, 1977; Schiesl, 1977; Teaford, 1975, 1984).

Throughout the 1960s up to the 1990s, attention was also drawn to civil service reform especially during the Progressive era. Mosher's early study (1968) provided a stage model of civil service development throughout the entire U.S. history. Other studies include those by Hoogenboom (1968) about the end of the spoils system, Tolbert and Zucker (1983) on civil service reforms between 1880 and 1935, Maranto and Schultz's (1991) brief history of the civil service, and Van Riper's (1997) wonderful article about mistakes and misunderstandings in the study of the history of the civil service. Although many studies tend to approach the civil service as a generic group in a juridical perspective, a more sociological approach is adopted in the study by Aron (1987) on middle-class civil servants in the middle of the 19th century and in Arnold's (1998) study of the development of political-administrative relations in 19th- and 20th-century America.

Political officeholders and civil servants are often investigated as a group. Some studies have been published about the development of a particular office such as Corwin (1970) and Arnold (1986) on the presidency, Hatch (1934, unusually early for this type of study) and Williams (1956) on the vice presidency, Bradley and Zald (1965-1966) on the recruitment of Chicago mayors, and Stillman (1974) on city managers. Biographies are more generally available for political officeholders and some of the

highest political executives and civil servants. Much less attention in this approach is devoted to the ranks below the top.

Although the studies in the postwar period elaborated on themes already picked up before the Second World War, the same cannot be said for the study of specific policy areas. This really became prominent from the 1970s on, as is demonstrated by studies on public works (Armstrong, 1976), education (Meyer, Tyack, Nagel, & Gordon, 1979; Stone & Stone, 1975), health insurance (Starr, 1982), and defense (Hooks, 1984). Welfare policy is the area studied most (e.g., Mohl, 1973; Skocpol, 1992; Trattner, 1979). The public policy stream in the United States appears to have discovered the historical approach (Ashford, 1991; *Journal of Policy History* since 1989).

No matter the attention it attracted, administrative history did not make it into the mainstream. It continued to be an individual's pursuit battling—if that—with the notion that public administration was forced and/or believed to provide ready-made solutions to contemporary challenges of government. The creation of *Administration Science Quarterly* and the emergence of organizational studies (whether in public administration or in sociology) is testimony to the belief that carefully operationalized quantitative studies would provide the kind of knowledge government needed, and in the process of that pursuit, the study of public administration would finally achieve its coveted “scientific” status. This approach to the study fitted with the behaviorist mood of the time.

## 6. THE UNLIMITED STATE, 1980s

In the 1980s, the tide appeared to turn in favor of more attention for the past. The major objective of administrative historical work became to improve our understanding of the origins and growth of the American administrative state along three different lines.

The first topic that received much attention was the role and position of the state in society also in relation to intergovernmental relations and subnational government. Several major studies were published about America's rich administrative past (Chandler, 1987; Fesler, 1982; Mansfield, 1982), documents of American administrative history (Mosher, 1983; see also U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1960, 1962, 1964), public life in the late 19th century (Keller, 1979), the American perception of state (Stillman, 1990), the development of state government in the 20th century (Garnett, 1980), the roots of American government and

bureaucracy (W. E. Nelson, 1982; Skowronek, 1982; Stillman, 1982, 1987; Van Riper, 1987), and the history of regulation (McGraw, 1985). The second topic concerned the origins and growth of the American welfare state (Skocpol & Ikenberry, 1983). And the third topic concerned the origins (Martin, 1987, 1988; Miewald, 1984, 1994) and development of American administrative thought (Keller, 1979; Morrow, 1987; Uveges, 1982) in the slipstream of the 50th anniversary of the American Society for Public Administration (Cooper, 1990; Gulick, 1990; Pugh, 1985, 1990). These three themes would continue to attract attention in the 1990s (Anechiarico & Jacobs, 1994; McSwite, 1997; Roberts, 1994; Spicer, 1995; Stillman, 1997).

This fits the general trends in administrative history quite well. For one, because this field of inquiry appears to produce book-length studies rather than journal articles. A survey of eight leading public administration journals (two American, two English, one French, one German, one Dutch, one international) indicated that the interest for this topic is slightly growing in the 1980s. Another general trend is that many of these articles concern the administrative history of the interplay between government and society at large, including the role and position of the state in society. Attention for administrative history proper (i.e., the study of structures and processes in and about government as they have existed or have been desired in the past and the actual and ideal place of functionaries therein) draws much less attention (Raadschelders, 1998b, pp. 7, 28-29). Toward the end of the decade, Waldo (1990) once again called for more attention for the past: "Why should there be a *History of Political Thought Journal* and not a *History of Government Journal*?" (p. 80). His desire has been met, for in Europe a *Yearbook of European Administrative History* has been published since 1989, and since that same year in the United States, the *Journal of Policy History* has been published.

In terms of approach, the 1980s constituted an important break with the past. Although from the past century on, the comparative-historical study of government was descriptive by nature and guided by theory and conceptualizations that would allow for comparisons of institutional development (especially in the comparative state making literature of the 1950s) (Raadschelders, 1998a, pp. 565-566), the neo-institutional approach of this decade developed along two different angles: (a) the rational approach that emphasizes transaction costs and (b) the historical-interpretative tradition that analyzes social evolution as a path-dependent phenomenon (Scott, Meyer, & Associates, 1994, p. 83). Although (neo-)institutional analysis *by the very definition* of institutions involves a cross-time



analysis, it is especially the second approach that has attracted attention in political science and public administration (Thelen & Steinmo, 1992, pp. 7, 27).

### **7. THE 1990s: DEMISE OF THE OLD AND/OR THE ADVENT OF THE NEW?**

Whether it is because of the end of this century and millennium or the dawn of the new, two conclusions can already be drawn about the development of the administrative history of the United States in this decade. One is that calls for a historical perspective have substantially increased (see Raadschelders, 1999), and the output in terms of articles and books is growing even though, or perhaps because, our students and practitioners appear to have “a diminished historical consciousness” (Schachter, 1998, p. 16). Another, more important feature is that once again, there is fairly widespread need to reinterpret our past to get a better understanding of the present. In this section, I will focus on this second feature because in the larger part of the 20th century, an administrative history was “produced” that fitted the rationalistic and modern ideal of research. With the advent of postpositivism, postmodernism, and narrativism, this “modern” approach has increasingly come under fire (Luton, 1999, p. 216). The themes pursued in the 1980s (the role and position of the state, the development of the welfare state, and the development of the discourse in public administration) continued to draw interest in the 1990s but with one difference: The need to reinterpret the existing frameworks of analysis and definitions of the situation was stronger now.

As far as I am able to see, and without the benefit of real hindsight, four routes of reinterpretation have emerged:

1. a reinterpretation of modernity itself (e.g., Adams, 1992),
2. a reinterpretation of our time as epochal change (e.g., Albrow, 1996),
3. a reinterpretation of the discourse in public administration (e.g., McSwite, 1997), and
4. a “setting the record straight” (e.g., Stivers, 1995).

The first route is that which analyzes the “modern” approach to our study with its emphasis on rigor and science. Thus, by way of example, Adams (1992) argued that our enthrallment with modernity and its focus on technical rationality prohibits us from adequately and more completely understanding the nature of present and possible future changes. His call

for more historical study is testimony to the sentiment that the modern frameworks really fail to make sense of the present. The same is argued by the postmodernists and narrativists, although in much stronger and more strident terms. Adams's analysis is relevant both for the discussion about the role and position of the state as well as for the reconstruction of the intellectual discourse. In fact, that second issue provides the framework within which we are able to "reinvent" the state's relation to society. The argument by Adams is very important, but, if I read him correctly, he perceives the need for historical analysis in a modern context. In other words, he does not embrace postmodernist and narrativist storytelling for its own sake. I concur with that position, but there is a more extreme way of reinterpreting the present and at the same time avoiding the "anything-goes" approach of the storytelling postmodernists.

The best example of that is Albrow's 1996 study in which he argues that we have actually entered a new epoch in history: that of the global age (following antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the modern period). It would be interesting to see how his book is received in the United States because he (a) recasts our understanding of the present outside the modern framework and thus (b) presents us with a different perspective on the future. His label of the epochal change draws our attention to a present and a future that makes for quite a different discourse analysis than what has been common so far in the United States. After all, the late-18th-century debates between Federalists and Anti-Federalists and the turn-of-the-last-century Progressive debates about more federal or more communal government were cast in terms of the past. And at the end of this century, we again have been provided with a discourse analysis that follows the same path, and this constitutes the third route that reinterpretation has taken.

The interesting and attractive study recently by McSwite (1997) essentially argues that the legitimacy crisis in the study and the field of public administration is a consequence of dichotomous thinking (e.g., politics vs. administration, democracy vs. efficiency, fact vs. value, etc.) befitting the dominance of the Federalist perspective throughout the history of U.S. government (pp. 132, 148). Once again, the attention of the Anti-Federalists and the old Progressivists for communal government has come to the foreground. We have seen above how in the Progressive era, that interest resulted in a sizable number of studies about colonial state and local government. It is probably still too early to tell if McSwite's study is representative of an emerging mood in our time, and it is certainly too early to tell whether it has generated studies of the administrative past that do not tread

the familiar grounds of the rationalist-managerial perspective. There is some indication, though, that such may be the case.

McSwite (1997) makes a compelling case for the argument that the male Progressivists did not want reform to appear “soft” and thus strung themselves up in the more masculine language of efficiency (p. 147). They argue that

the distortion of the dialogue of the founding of public administration came not primarily from an attempt to make the reform movement more masculine as much as from an attempt to make it more consistent with the Federalist way of thinking that has dominated American thought about government since the ratification of the Constitution. (p. 150)

The insight that U.S. administrative history has been dominated not just by a Federalist approach but by a masculine bias is an issue brought in the limelight by, among others, Stivers (1995), who argued that our understanding of the origins of the American welfare state are incomplete—to say the least—when paying attention to the “bureau men” and not to the “settlement women.” The references in her article indicate that she is not the only one who pursues that setting-the-record-straight route of reinterpreting the past (Baker, 1990; Sklar, 1993; Stivers, 1995).

## **8. STAGES IN AND APPROACHES TO ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES**

On the basis of the analysis above, it is possible to summarize the development of the administrative history of the United States (see Table 1). What is interesting in general about the American approach to this topic is that from the beginning of independence, a comparative and historical method was adopted in the hope it would provide guidance for future reforms. It was at the end of the 19th century when this comparative and historical approach became more concerned with the more mundane aspects of government (rather than the constitutional and political themes) that the administrative history of the United States started as an avenue of research and teaching. Characteristic for that origin is an apparent interest in both the Federalist as well as the Anti-Federalist perspectives, with the communal or communitarian approach more dominant in the early decades of the Progressive era and the efficiency advocates more dominant in the later decades of that same period. This Federalist perspective dominated most of the 20th century, and the function of history was to

**TABLE 1**  
**Stages in the Development of the Study of the**  
**Administrative History of the United States**

	<i>What Is the Function of History?</i>	<i>Time Context</i>	<i>Major Themes</i>	<i>Major Authors</i>
Historicism, 1820s to 1880s	To collect hard facts, impar- tial, objective	Academia detached from politics	Disconnected events, structure, constitutional history	Duganne
Old Progres- sivism, 1880s to 1930s	Reviving for- gotten past, more subjective	Anti-Federalist, communitar- ianism	Colonial govern- ment, constitu- tional history and politics, local and state government	Von Holst, Wilson, Mary Parker Follett
New Progres- sivism, 1880s to 1930s	To serve prog- ress, objective	Federalist, statism, and efficient government	Structure, general management, personnel, federal government	Turner, Beard, White, Wilson
Rationalism, 1930s to 1970s	Develop usable knowledge and middle- range theory based on facts, objective	Federalist, statism, and managerial government	Public management, civil service, case study approach, budget, policies	White, Van Riper, Caldwell, Karl, Nash, (Waldo), Neustadt and May
Unlimited state, 1980s	To understand role and posi- tion of state, objective and interpretative	Federalist, statism, and intergovern- mental relations	Roots of study of public administration, administrative and welfare state	Skowronek, Skocpol, Steinmo and Thelen
Old or new, 1990s	To rekindle old discourse, subjective and interpretative	Anti-Federalist, postpositivism, and post- modernism	Epochal change, role of women, discourse analysis	Adams, Albrow, Stivers, McSwite

develop usable knowledge based on facts. Only toward the end of this century, the “traditional” approach appears to be matched by attention for the Anti-Federalist perception that adopts a more interpretative approach, equally fitting in the American discourse of the past 200 years.

For all levels of government, we have administrative histories. With respect to the federal level, there are many studies of specific organizations, offices, and policies, and there is one general administrative history of federal government at large although limited in scope of time. The empirical research done since White completed his work would make a more comprehensive analysis of the development of federal government in the 20th century possible. Such a comprehensive administrative history does not exist for state or local governments. Most studies focus on either the colonial period or the reform age. With respect to the topics mentioned in sections 5 to 7 (state and nation, civil service, budgetary and financial issues, bureaucracy, particular offices), most attention went out to the 20th century. When considering what kind of topics have received little attention, the development of intergovernmental relations in the 19th and 20th centuries and the development of—for instance—planning and coordinating mechanisms as well as procedures within administration come to mind. There is literature on these, but that does not exceed the level of providing a general overview of stages.

We can take this summary of the state of the art one step further to a more concluding and evaluative level. For this, we can categorize the literature so far on a continuum between “history as history” (i.e., history as pure description) and “history as advocacy” (i.e., history as argument toward a present concern) (the author thanks Charles Goodsell for this distinction). Most of the studies mentioned in this article tend toward the history-as-history side, with White’s four-volume history as prime example. However, throughout the past 200+ years, there have been calls for more study of the history of government, arguing that it would help our understanding of the present. If pursued, this would be more on the history-as-advocacy side of which McSwite’s study is an excellent example. In this approach, history is “used” to advance an argument about a present state (of our knowledge, of intellectual crisis, and so forth). Perhaps the necessary distance in time to truly evaluate the present state of the art blurs my vision, but it seems to me that the history-as-advocacy literature appeared rather infrequent in the past two centuries (see references in sections 2-6 and Raadschelders, 1999) and has come much more to the forefront in the 1990s (section 7; Luton, 1999; Marini, 1994; Wamsley & Wolf, 1996). We should have both, of course. There are many studies in administrative history, and this interest is picking up. At the same time, we could use more studies such as by McSwite that use history to advance an argument about the present (as did, e.g., Charles Beard). One can imagine studies that open with history as history and move into history as advocacy.

An example would be the reasons of the emergence and development of the welfare state to subsequently discuss various options of welfare reform in light of past commitments.

The state of the art of the administrative history of the United States can also be outlined in terms of level of analysis and cognitive goal. The collective level of analysis focuses on state, government, and society in general, whereas the individual level of analysis will take—literally—individuals and/or individual organizations and institutions as point of departure. In terms of cognitive goal, the positivist approach is the one most of us have been trained in. It is rationalistic, fits in the framework of modernity, and departs from theory and theoretical concepts in the hope to unravel structural patterns and thus present us with similarities between cases. The reflective-interpretative approach, on the other hand, is more descriptive, uses case studies, and emphasizes differences between cases rather than the similarities. A more reflective interpretative approach at the individual level could be provided by “biographies” (e.g., Stillman, 1998).

Combining these (see Table 2), it appears that most publications on the administrative history of the United States have been written at a collective level of analysis, with the positivist mode dominating between—say—the 1910s and the 1970s, whereas between the 1880s and 1900s and the 1980s and 1990s the positivist approach seems to be more balanced with and challenged by a reflective and interpretative approach. The individual level of analysis appears to be much less a concern of “administrative historians.” It is conceivable, though, that a neo-institutional analysis in the rational choice tradition is written about changing institutional arrangements in the public sector, following the example of, for example, North’s analysis of America’s economic growth and performance (Davis & North, 1971; North, 1990). This would be quite a challenging undertaking, especially in the light of North’s remark that

it is no accident that economic models of the polity developed in the public choice literature make the state into something like the Mafia—or, to employ its terminology, a leviathan. The state then becomes nothing more than a machine to redistribute wealth and income. . . . We need to know much more about culturally derived norms of behavior and how they interact with formal rules. (North, 1990, p. 140)

The size of contemporary government in comparison to that of the late 18th and the late 19th century would justify the broadening of the research fields to be plowed along the lines suggested by North.

**TABLE 2**  
**Approaches to the Administrative History of the United States**

<i>Level of Analysis</i>	<i>Cognitive Goal</i>	
	<i>Positivist</i>	<i>Reflective/Interpretative</i>
Collective	Progressive “historians” (Wilson, Beard); administrative scientists (White)	Descriptive history (Karl, Van Riper, Nash, Caldwell); case-study approach (Neustadt and May); historical institutionalism (Skocpol, Steinmo and Thelen); reinterpretation of the past (Adams, Luton, McSwite, Stivers)
Individual	Rational choice angle in neo-institutionalism	Biography (Stillman)

A few final comments are appropriate. In terms of quality and quantity of publications, the study of administrative history of the United States is in good shape. The empirical knowledge and theoretical insights generated provide a good foundation for stepping up research efforts in this area. Certainly, the fact that American political leaders and scholars have displayed a profound interest in a comparative and historical approach is a sign that the past is not taken for granted. What makes the American efforts in this area unique is that it is not so much focused on the reconstruction of past events in itself as it is on reconstructing the facts of government-in-development in the context of the deeply grounded political theories about governance. The work done so far, however, is the result of individual initiative and interest. It has generally not trickled down into our textbooks. Although the hype about the end of the millennium is essentially based on an agreement about chronology made long ago, and thus promises less change than we think and more continuity than we perhaps would like, we may consider to seize the day and work on a more program-based development of administrative history.

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