

Public administration—the art of turning big policy ideas into solid results—ranks among the very oldest of intellectual disciplines. Public administrators were managing government programs long before Plato and Aristotle worried about how they *ought* to do so. Aaron Wildavsky's lively study of the Torah powerfully makes the case that Moses needs to be understood not only as a religious leader but also as a political leader, one who struggled to transform the Jews from runaway slaves into a coherent nation.¹ Much of the Bible's first five books is a study of organization, rule-making, and other forms of bureaucratization to ensure that the Israelites walked in God's ways. Caesar's commentary on the Gallic wars describes the administrative and political challenges he faced in subduing the Gauls, conquering Britain, and keeping strong the lines to Rome. Indeed, as long as humans have been writing, they have been writing about administration. It is a safe bet that they were worrying about administration long before they started writing about it.

Administration is about organizing people to do complex jobs. *Public* administration is about organizing people to do complex jobs in pursuit of a broader, government-defined interest. It is, in short, about applying the public interest to the management of work. The thread of public administration has wound through human history from its beginning, as long as difficult social jobs and multiple players have required coordination. In fact, public administration—its study and practice—predates democracy and its debates. Its very centrality, however, has also ensured constant conflict. Public administration is not only about getting government to work well, but it is also about managing—both promoting and limiting—the exercise of governmental power. Through the centuries, despots have sometimes misused that power. Ineffective leaders have produced poorly managed programs, which caused their citizens to suffer. Over the centuries, citizens have frequently disagreed over what government should do—and how. They have wanted a strong and effec-

tive government, but they have resisted a government so strong and effective as to threaten their liberty.

Political conflict has thus always been an inevitable component of public administration, around the world and especially within the United States. So too are complaints about administrative mismanagement. Those who think that complaints about waste, fraud, and abuse in government programs are a new phenomenon have only to look at General George Washington's letters from the field. Officers in units at the rear often stopped wagons heading for the front. They unloaded the supplies they needed for their own men and left front-line troops chronically undersupplied. Some of the government's own purchasing agents encouraged defense contractors to bid up prices, which increased their own commissions.² The much-repeated news reports of the last decades of the twentieth century—of overpriced screws and toilet seats—have a rich tradition in American political history.

Americans, on the other hand, have always called on government at the first sign of trouble. When nineteenth-century riverboat steamers exploded, citizens demanded that government toughen safety standards. More recently they complain about government spending, but they plead with elected officials not to cut Medicare. They criticize IRS tax collectors, but they insist on good weather forecasts, safe air-traffic control, and effective treatment of anthrax. Since the days of King George III, Americans have loathed public administration because it represents the exercise of governmental power. New innovations constantly create the demand for rules, Deborah Spar argues.³ As columnist David Wessel explains, it is an eternal cycle. On the other hand, Americans have expected high levels of public service in exchange for the taxes they dutifully paid: "A revolutionary new technology emerges—the compass, the telegraph, the radio, the Internet, the mobile phone, the science of cloning. Pioneers profit, enjoying the gold rush. Pirates arrive. Pioneers seek to protect their property rights. Problems of coordinating emerge. Government looks impotent." Eventually, the demand for rules of the game becomes inescapable and government typically supplies them.⁴

Public administration thus is paradoxical, caught between citizens' antipathy toward government and their insistence on government services and protection. It is an eternal paradox for all public administration, but it is especially deeply rooted in American democracy. In part this is because armed revolt against government power gave birth to the nation. In part, though, it is because fierce individualism has long driven American culture. And in part it is because conflicting expectations

between tax collections and government services, between the abuse of government power and the benefits of using it, have been particularly fierce in this nation. Citizens—especially American citizens—resent the exercise of government power almost as much as they rail at its inefficiency.

This paradox also appears in the academic study of public administration. On one hand, there can be no understanding of government and politics without a study of public administration. Ambitious public goals are empty without the capacity to meet them, so it is impossible to study government adequately without also studying how it is administered. On the other hand, the study of public administration has long struggled to find a seat at the academic table. In part, this is because its work is mundane, especially in comparison with more lofty debates about the meaning of human rights and the tragedy of the commons. In part, this is because its work is messy, because it deals with the constant complications of human behavior in complex organizations. In part, this is because the complexity of administrative action creates enormous methodological problems that frustrate the creation of robust theory.

Orthodox public administration conquered these problems long enough to enjoy a truly golden age in the first half of the twentieth century. By the end of the century, however, both the theory and practice of public administration had fallen onto hard times. As an academic field of study, public administration had an uncertain intellectual home. Its students struggled for acceptance within traditional academic disciplines (although by the 1990s public administration began a notable resurgence). In practice, public administrators struggled to cope with rising expectations of performance, declining public enthusiasm for taxes, growing complexity in doing ever-harder things, and increasing calls for fundamental “reinvention” of their operations. From ending welfare as we know it to providing a healthy cradle-to-grave environment, public administrators have found themselves constantly exhorted to do more with less. They have sought more insight from theory just as theory struggled to reestablish its former prominence.

The founders created American constitutional government to limit government’s power. Public administration is about making the exercise of government power effective. Governments and citizens everywhere, at all times, have quarreled over the use of such power. While Moses spent forty days on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments from God, his people broke God’s law by building a golden calf to worship. They had found the law too hard to follow, and they rejected

Moses' attempts to enforce it. Of course, these were the same people who had previously welcomed God's power, exercised through Moses, to lead them out of bondage in Egypt.⁵ In twenty-first century consultant-speak, Moses' first try to promulgate the commandments failed because of the lack of constituent buy-in. For millennia since then, people have sought the exercise of political power to advance their aims but have struggled against that power when its burdens limited their freedom. Add to this age-old mix America's special antipathy toward government power and its historic devotion to the motto "give me liberty or give me death." The result is the profound tension within the peculiarly American form of public administration.

The tension springs from four fundamentally different intellectual traditions: a *Hamiltonian* tradition that seeks an effective government, that promotes top-down government, and that favors a strong executive; a *Jeffersonian* tradition that celebrates America's agrarian roots, that promotes bottom-up government, and that seeks a weak executive; a *Madisonian* tradition that tries to balance political power among competing forces; and a *Wilsonian* tradition that prefers to concentrate administrative power in hierarchically structured organizations.⁶ In this chapter and the next, we examine these traditions.

THE HAMILTONIAN TRADITION

Administrative historians credit Alexander Hamilton as the true founder of the American administrative state.⁷ Leonard D. White's sweeping history of American bureaucratic development, for example, concludes simply, "Hamilton was the administrative architect of the new government."⁸ While many leaders shaped the new republic, Hamilton's voice was loudest when it came to devising an administrative scheme for the new nation. He made a forceful case for a strong executive—a case, in fact, he often made so strongly that he stirred anger among many political leaders. At the Constitutional Convention in 1787, he made an impassioned case for an elected monarchy. When the delegates rejected that idea, he continued to argue for a strong and powerful national government.

Hamilton built his case on the manifest failures of the Articles of Confederation. The confederation was a masterpiece of over-devolution. The Continental Congress had rejected John Dickinson's plan for a strong national government and in its place constructed a plan to give the states maximum discretion. It took the states years even to ratify these limited rules, and in the meantime, they quarreled over everything

from boundaries to commerce. After the victorious new nation won the Revolutionary War, its leaders were embarrassed by their failure to get the states to live up to the terms of the Treaty of Paris, which had ended the war. Some states created their own foreign policies while others disputed who had control of the western lands. The states squabbled over paying for an army, and some leaders worried that this type of spending might open the frontier to poaching by the Spanish and British. By 1787, nearly everyone agreed that the Articles had not worked and that some stronger national government was needed.

The central problems proved the enduring ones: making the national government strong enough to be effective; creating an executive powerful enough to make the government strong; yet preventing a concentration of power that would threaten liberty. Hamilton's was the most important voice in making the case for a strong executive. As the nation's first treasury secretary, he wrote reports on public credit, national banking, and manufacturing that ultimately created the framework for the modern executive branch.

Three basic principles drove Hamilton's views on public administration: independence, power, and responsibility.⁹ He recognized that the law, as passed by Congress, bound the executive branch. He also strongly believed that the executive needed independence in implementing the law. Within its own sphere, he said, the Constitution gave the executive freedom of action. In *Federalist* 71, he pointed out that "it is one thing to be subordinate to the laws, and another to be dependent on the legislative body." In essence, Hamilton was making two points. One was the need for separation of powers. A too-powerful legislature could thwart government just as could a too-powerful executive. He embraced the notion of balance to counter this danger. The other was the need for delegation. Once Congress passed a law, Hamilton believed, it needed to allow the executive flexibility in determining how best to administer it. He recognized that one of the most important roles for the executive was concentrating the expertise required to administer the law well. If the executive was to do so, it needed to rely on this expertise as it managed public programs.

From there, Hamilton argued the need for executive power. In perhaps his most-quoted passage, Hamilton contended in *Federalist* 70 that "energy in the executive is a leading character in the definition of good government." The Articles had clearly demonstrated that weak government produced poor policy and worse results. The new Constitution, he believed, required a government that could act deci-

sively over the long haul to pursue the national purpose. Failing to do so—creating a government that was ineffective—was unwise and ultimately threatening to democratic government. If the people were to rule and be served, Hamilton argued, they needed a government strong enough to protect their interests and fulfill their ambitions.

In *Federalist 70*, he outlined what “energy in the executive” required. His analysis was perhaps the first textbook in American public administration, and it set the foundation for public administration orthodoxy that emerged in its fullest form a century later. Energy first requires *unity*, he said. There must be a single top administrator, the president, with clear lines of authority to those charged with managing government programs. This executive must have *duration*. There must be consistency in administration over time. The argument for duration was, of course, a not-so-subtle suggestion that the legislature, driven by popular opinion, could not produce a sufficiently strong foundation for effective government management. Finally, he said, there must be adequate *competence*. The executive needed to have enough expertise to know how to carry policy ideas forward to achieve effective results.

On one level, of course, *Federalist 70* lays out the central elements of any effective administrative system, elements that the Progressives rediscovered a century later. On another level, however, Hamilton’s argument raised many of the same worries that had stalled Dickinson’s argument for a strong central government a decade before. A unified, long-term, highly competent executive brought worries about the risks of a too-strong executive—worries that were to surface periodically throughout American history.

Hamilton’s third basic principle, in addition to independence and power, was responsibility. This was his argument about keeping administration accountable and preventing it from becoming too powerful. If the executive was to be empowered to act independently of Congress, it would also ultimately be subject to its oversight. For example, Hamilton accepted the power of Congress to investigate the executive departments’ actions and to impeach the chief executive. He clearly was not happy about surrendering authority to the legislature; he would surely have preferred a far stronger executive branch and less chance of congressional intrusion into legislative affairs. But he accepted these provisions as central tenets in the new system’s balance-of-powers structure.

Hamilton worked hard to translate these principles into practice. As treasury secretary, he led the battle for national assumption of the states’ revolutionary war debt and the creation of the First Bank of the United

States. His "Report on Manufactures" laid out his long-term vision for a manufacturing-driven economy, one strongly supported by government. James Madison observed that his views were a coherent package that came together "like the links of a chain." Hamilton biographer Richard Brookhiser explained, "Settling America's debts would fortify its credit; credit would allow manufactures to develop; a diverse and flourishing economy would generate the revenue that would ensure the debt's proper funding."¹⁰ Underlying it all was a grand vision for a brash, ambitious new country. It was a country that would rise above its agrarian foundation to play a major role in global commerce. A strong national government, led by a powerful executive, would support this economic transformation and, in turn, generate jobs and economic growth for citizens.

This ambitious vision caused Hamilton unending problems, especially with the Jeffersonians. In the end, it led to his death in a duel with Jefferson's vice president, Aaron Burr. As Brookhiser puts it, "He had been trading partisan shots with the man who killed him for twelve years before they traded real ones."¹¹ His personal life, from a high-profile sex scandal to his ongoing feud with the Jeffersonians, was puzzling. But his long shadow across American government is unmistakable. He made the case for strong government, structured with unitary command and managed with skill. He recognized, if reluctantly, the need for a balance of power while asserting the executive's preeminence. He contended that unlike the legislature, with elected representatives moving in and out, the executive needed long-term capacity and leadership. He made the case for a strong executive branch, run from the top down but also responsible to the other branches and, ultimately, to the people. In vision, writing, and practice, Hamilton truly was the father of the modern administrative state.

THE JEFFERSONIAN TRADITION

If Hamilton shaped the American administrative state, Thomas Jefferson cast a vastly longer shadow over the American political tradition. The gentleman farmer from Virginia is well known as author of the Declaration of Independence, president of the United States, and founder of the University of Virginia, as his tombstone says simply. His home, Monticello, is a notable tourist attraction and great architectural achievement—one celebrated, in fact, on the back of the nickel, with Jefferson's own image on the other side. Hamilton trumps Jefferson in

the currency department: His image on the ten-dollar bill is better known, by contrast, than Jefferson's on the little-seen two-dollar bill. But Hamilton's statue in front of the Treasury Department pales in comparison with Jefferson's impressive memorial on the shore of Washington's Tidal Basin. Daniel J. Boorstin notes, "The vitality of Thomas Jefferson is one of the striking features of modern American history. He always has something to say to us, and the nation always seems ready to listen."¹²

On government, Jefferson's view was simple: It was not, according to Boorstin, "the expression of political theory, but the largely unreflective answer of healthy men to the threat of tyranny."¹³ The threat of abuse of power—especially executive power—hung heavy over Jefferson. Unlike Hamilton's early background in commerce and accounting, Jefferson came of age as a gentleman farmer in Virginia. He drew his strength from the love of the land. The British crown was a very long way from his mountaintop house. The exercise of its power had perennially poached on his freedom, and he was determined that the new American nation would never again risk losing liberty. His Declaration of Independence is a ringing expression of his rejection of tyranny.

When the new Constitution replaced the Articles of Confederation, Jefferson joined George Washington's cabinet as secretary of state. His relationship with treasury secretary Hamilton was constantly tumultuous. They engaged in a long-running policy feud over the question of federal power. For Jefferson, power came from the land and from the people. Hamilton distrusted popular rule out of his fear that it would retard commerce and industry. When Hamilton proposed the creation of a national bank, Jefferson fought it thinking that the bank would encourage speculation and undermine agriculture. Hamilton believed the bank would provide the federal government with the power it needed. Jefferson was a staunch advocate of the limitations on federal power embodied in the Tenth Amendment. The differences helped spawn the first American political parties, Hamilton's Federalists and Jefferson's Democratic-Republicans. Yet despite their differences and because Hamilton despised Aaron Burr, Hamilton supported Jefferson in the 1800 presidential campaign.

Jefferson and Hamilton could not have been more different. If Hamilton celebrated the nation's commercial, manufacturing, and banking future, Jefferson venerated the nation's agrarian roots. Where Hamilton argued vigorously for a strong national government with a powerful executive and a limited citizen role, Jefferson believed in local

government, a strong legislature, and popular control. Jefferson argued for limited government, while Hamilton pursued an energetic government. Their philosophical disagreements erupted over the Bank of the United States and continued for more than a decade until Hamilton's death.¹⁴

Jefferson's almost religious belief in limited government has resonated throughout American history. His instinct, especially as captured in his early writings, was to keep as much power in the people's hands as possible. If government needed to exercise power, it ought to be state and local governments, he argued, not the federal government. And if the federal government needed to exercise power, Congress, with its roots in popular will, ought to be supreme. Jefferson championed federalism because it established the predominance of state governments in the American system. He was a champion of the separation of powers because it provided checks on executive functions. Like many of the founders, he worried constantly that monarchy might reassert itself, and he saw a monarchist threat in Hamilton's incessant arguments for an energetic executive. The foundation of society, he believed, ought to be individual liberty. Government's foremost responsibility was to promote that liberty. Accountability in the system had to come from the bottom up.

In practice, however, Jefferson's philosophical approach did not much inform his approach to public administration. Jefferson had a "speculative rather than an administrative mind," Leonard D. White concluded. In fact, he writes, "Jefferson was not interested . . . in the normal process of day-by-day administration." Jefferson, in his own words, believed "there are no mysteries in it." It simply calls for "common sense and honest intentions." He compared government administration to running a farm, and "we all know that a farm, however large, is not more difficult to direct than a garden, and does not call for more attention or skill." White was incredulous and argued that such a statement could scarcely have been made by anyone familiar with the difficulties of keeping even a modest government running.¹⁵ The model fit neither practical reality nor Jefferson's own approach to the presidency. He feared power, but "he nevertheless found himself forced to exercise it ruthlessly," White noted. "His preferences were frustrated by circumstances that compelled him to abandon his own theories."¹⁶ He enforced the embargo extending the Alien and Sedition Acts. He negotiated the purchase of Louisiana, whose constitutionality was questioned, and he dispatched Lewis and Clark to survey that vast expansion

of American territory. As a philosopher, Jefferson believed in a weak government and in strong individual liberty. As president, however, he was truly Hamiltonian in supporting a strong and energetic presidency.

These conflicts—between Jefferson and Hamilton as political philosophers, and between Jefferson the philosopher and Jefferson the president—have long engaged historians. Over time, however, the Hamiltonian foundations of Jefferson's presidency have largely been forgotten. A romantic reading of his intellectual tradition, of his reverence for liberty, and his life as the gentleman farmer of Monticello have more powerfully defined the Jeffersonian tradition. His almost theological arguments for limited government have echoed in conservative minds throughout the centuries. These themes drove the South's revolt against Lincoln during the Civil War as much as they did the conservative congressional Republicans' short-lived Contract with America during the 1990s. In these cases, as in Jefferson's life, the romantic themes have always collided with pragmatic realities. The North bitterly fought to preserve the Union in the 1860s, and in the 1990s Americans discovered that they did not really want the more limited government that the congressional Republicans promised. One can debate—endlessly—the struggles between Jefferson's ideas and actions. One can also debate how to factor his thoughts into the quest to make government, whatever its size and reach, truly effective. Jefferson's paradoxical life helps underline two big quandaries—what government *ought to do* and *how best to do it*. But throughout the ensuing debates, Jefferson's ideas have held sway. His ideas have made a lasting case for limiting government power, for keeping governmental power more in the hands of the legislature than in the administration, and for maximizing individual liberty. They have defined a counterpoint to Hamilton's argument for a powerful executive branch.

THE MADISONIAN TRADITION

James Madison's work defines a third American administrative tradition. It is, in fact, not so much a theory of administration as a more general approach to politics in America's republican government. Madison was the architect of America's balance-of-power system and thus a designer of the tactics that Americans have used for centuries to keep an uneasy peace between the conflicting Hamiltonian and Jeffersonian forces. Madison's influence on the Constitution is unquestioned. The notes he kept on the Constitutional Convention's deliberations remain

the best record of the debate. His was the most influential voice in crafting the Constitution and the strongest voice for developing the separation of powers. Later, he joined with Hamilton and John Jay to write the *Federalist Papers*, but his contributions are perhaps the best known. In particular, *Federalist* 10 is the definitive explanation of the linkage of government power and economic power. Economic differences among the states could breed conflict. A strong, effective, well-balanced national government, on the other hand, could bring stability and prosperity.

Like Jefferson, he differed with Hamilton over just the how strong the executive ought to be. But unlike Jefferson, whose more doctrinaire position held that power ought to be left in the hands of the people and the local governments, Madison developed a subtler approach that hinged on balancing power among the major players. He worried about the "mischiefs of faction" and the risks that economic and political competition could undermine both social order and the new federal government. He also worried about the risk that a too-strong government could promote tyranny. To resolve these problems, he hewed a pragmatic middle position between Hamilton and Jefferson. The new system was a larger and more complex republic than thinkers had often considered wise, but he concluded that the system offered more internal balance, more diverse institutional roles, and more factions—all the better to balance the ambitions of any faction and block its ability to exercise monarchical power.¹⁷

In *Federalist* 51, Madison argued, "It is evident that each department [that is, branch of government] ought to have a will of its own." To prevent "a gradual concentration of the several powers in the same department," he contended that the key lies in "giving to those who administer each department, the necessary constitutional means, and personal motives, to resist encroachments of the others. The provision for defense must in this, as in other cases, be made commensurate to the danger of attack. Ambition must be made to counteract ambition." Then comes the most famous piece of *The Federalist*: "If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: You must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place, oblige it to control itself." The legislature, he argued, ought to predominate in a republican government. To prevent legislative tyranny, legislative power was divided between two houses. His biggest worry, however, which he shared with most of the founders, was preventing renewed executive tyranny. Separating gov-

ernment powers provided dual checks, through the legislative and judicial branches, on executive power.

In fact, of course, the founders never fully subscribed to a complete separation of powers among the branches. For them, it was more a matter of blending powers. The president can veto acts of Congress, Congress can impeach and remove a president, the president appoints Supreme Court justices, and Congress confirms them. In *Federalist* 48, Madison pointed to the "partial mixture" of powers as a safeguard—indeed, an enhancement—of republican government.¹⁸ The inherent messiness of the American constitutional system prevented the abuse of power. That also made its effective exercise difficult, as Hamilton often later pointed out. But it provided the safeguards for which a new nation yearned.

Madison devoted most of his contributions to *The Federalist* to reassuring his fellow citizens that the new Constitution did not create a government so strong as to threaten their liberty. He pointed to the risks that continuing the Articles of Confederation would bring, and he energetically led the charge for the new form of government. Like Jefferson, however, he worked to protect liberty by ensuring that no part of this new government became too powerful. He saw great virtue in federalism, especially as stated in the Tenth Amendment, which reserved powers to the states. Most of all, Madison devised an approach to government founded on a separation—actually a blending—of powers. Administration and bureaucracy did not preoccupy him. Like Jefferson, he did not focus heavily on the execution of government powers but worried more about government's overall architecture.

Like Jefferson, Madison had bitterly fought Hamilton's plans for a strong national government. In part, as with Jefferson, his differences lay along North-South lines, with Hamilton championing commerce and the two Virginians, Jefferson and Madison, promoting agrarian interests. He opposed Hamilton's proposal for federal assumption of state debts. Virginia had retired most of its debt, but Hamilton's New York had not. He objected to Hamilton's plans for a new tariff and a national bank. By the end of his presidency, however, Madison, like Jefferson, had become more Hamiltonian. He came to support both the national bank and a tariff to protect American industries. In the broad sweep of American political thought, however, Madison's separation-of-powers ideas have had much more influence than his more pragmatic adaptation of Hamilton's views to the presidency.

Unlike Hamilton, who had an administration-based view of government, Madison's ideas were fundamentally political. The basic political

features of the system—the institutions created to exercise government power and how to balance power among them—were for Madison its most important elements. Thus, he did not develop an explicit theory of administration. Rather, he built a political theory in which administration was subservient, in practical operation and in theoretical understanding, to political power. He was a political scientist to Hamilton's public administrationist and Jefferson's political theorist.

THE WILSONIAN TRADITION

The fourth major theme of American administrative thought did not develop until more than two generations later. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, American government had suffered embarrassing breakdowns. Development of the West presented new opportunities for corruption, and greedy developers eagerly took advantage. Stunning new technologies, from electric lights to the telegraph and telephone, offered new conveniences, but market competition left some areas unserved and other areas tangled with spaghetti-like masses of wires. Corporate trusts brought huge concentrations of private power and new threats to public well-being.

In response, a new political movement, Progressivism, sprang up with a twin messages: Government had a positive role to play in shaping, balancing, and controlling corporate power; to play that role, government needed to be strong enough to be effective. In many ways, the Progressives were children of Hamilton. It had taken a century for Hamilton's vision of a mercantile America to emerge. When it did mature, however, it came with a concentration of power and threat to republican government that Hamilton had not anticipated.

Unlike the theorists of a century before, the Progressives had a tightly integrated approach to the relationship between political and administrative power. With the American Revolution a distant memory of more than a century before, the specter of George III was not so frightening. But with the emergence of corporate monopolies, the threats of unfettered market competition loomed large indeed. In the face of those monopolies, the Progressives argued the need for a stronger government, both to rein in the abuses of corporate power and to bring Americans a better life: quicker transportation, better communication, protection from an ever-more-dizzying collection of external threats. With American "manifest destiny" secure—with the United States stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans—the next step

lay in developing the land between. That meant a government that could secure a continental railroad, make credit available for citizens who needed to borrow for their businesses, and redefine the historic commitment to the common welfare.

The Progressives saw a strong government as a balance to the corporate world and as the natural next step to prosperity. They worried, however, that building a stronger government would open a new route for private power to capture control of the public agenda. Political machines celebrated their invention of "honest graft" and profoundly dishonest tactics for gaining leverage over municipal governments. If government was to be stronger, the Progressives needed to keep it from being captured by narrow interests. They found themselves squarely in the middle of the same debate that had preoccupied the founders. This time, however, instead of fears that a monarchist administration might dominate American government, the Progressives worried that king-like corporate titans and corruption might control the political system. They saw a stronger, better-organized government—and a more effective public administration—as essential to a new balance of political power.

A stronger federal government, however, raised the familiar problem of how to keep a more powerful government from undermining democratic government. In response to this issue, a thirty-one-year-old professor at Princeton University, Woodrow Wilson, wrote an article suggesting how this balance ought to be struck. The author was not yet famous and the 1887 article, "The Study of Administration," was not much read. Only when Leonard D. White's famous 1950 textbook discussed it extensively did scholars pay it serious attention.¹⁹ Since then, however, Wilson's article has become a classic as the first American statement of modern public administration. Scholars have celebrated his argument about the relationship between political institutions and public administration. "It is the object of administrative study," he wrote, "to discover, first, what government can properly and successfully do, and, secondly, how it can do these proper things with the utmost efficiency and at the least possible cost either of money or of energy."²⁰ Determining what government could do best and how it could best do it were the central questions for the Progressives' approach to government.

Wilson began his article by noting that "at the same time that the functions of government are every day becoming more complex and difficult, they are also vastly multiplying in number."²¹ As he famously pointed out, "It is getting harder to *run* a constitution than to frame one."²² That is why, Wilson argued, "there should be a science of admin-

istration which shall seek to straighten the paths of government, to make its business less unbusinesslike, to strengthen and purify its organization, and to crown its duties with dutifulness."²³

American government, he suggested, had grown quickly, like a child who had become taller but more awkward at the same time. For clues about how to manage a modern state effectively, Wilson looked to Europe, especially the Prussians and French. The English and Americans, by contrast, had "long and successfully studied the art of curbing executive power to the constant neglect of perfecting executive methods." The concern had been far more with making government "just and moderate" than "well-ordered and effective."²⁴ Wilson sought to marry the Anglo-American strategies for controlling administrative power with Franco-Prussian strategies for enhancing it.

The lesson that Wilson drew from these other nations was that "the field of administration is a field of business . . . removed from the hurry and strife of politics."²⁵ To be sure, the great truths that drive the political process lie at the core of administration as well. But Wilson believed that "administration lies outside the proper sphere of *politics*. Administrative questions are not political questions. Although politics sets the tasks for administration, it should be not suffered to manipulate its offices." His evidence? Wilson pointed to the Germans, for example, who had made such a separation the bedrock of an effective administrative system.²⁶ That did not mean Wilson wanted to make the American system more German, or more like any other system dominated by monarchist traditions. "If I see a murderous fellow sharpening a knife cleverly, I can borrow his way of sharpening the knife without borrowing his probable intent to commit murder with it." He concluded that we could learn from others how to administer our own system more effectively without "getting any of their diseases into our veins."²⁷

Wilson's formulation, especially his argument about separating administration and politics, has defined the central battle of modern public administration. He argued that public administration could be made stronger and more effective by borrowing the best practices from administrators around the world. It could be made more accountable by separating administration from politics, empowering administration to follow political direction, and making administrators ultimately responsible to policymakers. In making this argument, he sought to resolve the field's eternal dilemma. Separating administration from politics could free administrators from political interference in their work and thus enhance administrative efficiency. Separating politics from administra-

tion could strengthen the ability of elected officials to oversee administration and thus enhance accountability.

Orthodox public administrationists seized on Wilson's formulation. Wilson's argument made the case for a separate field of study in public administration and suggested, at least implicitly, a methodology. It was one that fit neatly into the orthodoxy that had emerged in the first half of the twentieth century: focus on the process and structure of government organizations; explore strategies to make them more efficient; keep them separate from political institutions to ensure their effectiveness; but ultimately hold them accountable to elected officials for their exercise of power. As powerful as some public administrationists found the argument, many political scientists argued it was hopelessly naive to pretend that one could actually separate administration from politics. If public administrationists used Wilson's article as a manifesto to define the field, many political scientists seized on it as a justification for dismissing it. The emerging public policy schools likewise saw in Wilson's article—and the field's embrace of it—a validation of their efforts to invent a new approach. To his critics, Wilson neither got to the core of effective program implementation nor made the critical linkages to bureaucratic politics.

Wilson's small article was barely read for sixty years, but it emerged in the intellectual debates just as critical boundaries were beginning to form. If his article did not broadly shape the Progressive tradition, it certainly captured its most important administrative ideas. It explained the Progressives' efforts to strengthen bureaucracy without threatening democracy. At the same time, it clearly defined the target at which political scientists and public policy scholars shot when they took aim at the field.

What should we make of Wilson's politics-administration separation? Even a casual observer of politics and administration would quickly reject the idea that the two are truly separate. A senior official in a major American city once told me that his department had a special plan to help Democrats in case of a major snowstorm on election day: city plows went first to the wards that had the highest percentage of Democratic voters to make sure they made it to the polls. There can be no clearer case of administration having political impact—or of political incentives shaping administrative decisions.

Moreover, the administration of law inevitably involves the exercise of discretion. Exercising discretion inevitably requires value choices, and value choices are without doubt political decisions. No law can ever

detail all the decisions that administrators on the front lines must make, and sometimes even the smallest of front-line decisions can have great political implications. Witness the election-day snow removal plan: which streets get plowed first can influence which voters end up at the polls. Other administrative decisions, from how to translate tax legislation into regulations or which road proposals to fund, involve both discretion and value choices. For many observers, therefore, Wilson's argument was not only naive, but it hid the implicit (or explicit) political judgments made by administrators and limited the ability of elected officials to hold them accountable for the exercise of discretion.

Wilson's argument, actually, was much more fundamental. Like other Progressives, he believed that government needed to play an important role in a society that was becoming ever more complex. To play that role, public administration needed to be strong and effective. He argued that Americans, preoccupied with high-profile constitutional issues, had paid far too little attention to figuring out how to *run* their constitution, especially by comparison with many European nations. He believed that Americans could learn important lessons from the European experience while maintaining American democratic principles. Perhaps most important, he believed that effective democracy required competent, politically impartial administrators, who could work free from political interference.

Wilson was scarcely naive. Nor was he alone in asserting the politics-administration dichotomy. Indeed, the American Political Science Association's first president, Frank Goodnow, wrote a book in 1900 that made the same argument.²⁸ Wilson, Goodnow, and their colleagues grew out of a tradition in which public administration had received relatively little attention, either from elected officials or from scholars. New social problems were emerging that the existing administrative system could not solve effectively. Special interests were infiltrating government administration and were threatening to steer government action to private, not public, interests. Their argument was not so much to wring politics from the study or practice of administration, though. Wilson quite explicitly recognized the role of constitutional politics in the administrative system, and he had earlier written a more famous work, titled *Congressional Government*. For Wilson, Congress was "the central and predominant power of the system."²⁹ His argument, rather, was that, to be effective, administration had to be protected from political interference. Just *how* that ought to be done remained a constant dispute. In fact, it ultimately caused a fundamental schism between pub-

lic administration and the rest of political science and a break between the field of public administration and the public policy community.

Wilson's work nevertheless was—and continues to be—an enormous influence on American public administration. It was fully compatible with Madison's separation-of-powers argument, but unlike Madison's approach it had an explicit role for administration. Like Jefferson, he recognized the importance of responsiveness and local governance, but Wilson shared with Hamilton a strong belief in effective administrative power. Wilson had much in common with Hamilton, but he came to the issue with less commitment to *national* power and with the more subtle sense of government's complexity that a century of experience helped nurture. Like Hamilton, he laid an important cornerstone in the intellectual construct of public administration.³⁰

IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES

These four traditions represent the basic approaches that have framed both the study and practice of American public administration since the beginning of the twentieth century. Over time, these traditions have risen and fallen in importance and emphasis. Indeed, the history of American public administration has identified three recurring themes. First, at the core of public administration rests important and enduring ideas. Second, these ideas push both theory and practice in opposite directions. Third, the balance among these ideas has shifted over time, so no approach has defined orthodoxy for long. It is scarcely surprising, then, that the field of public administration has always found itself amidst political conflict and intellectual tumult. The conflicts center in part on whether the bureaucracy is seen, by both practitioners and scholars, as the primary actor or a supporting cast member in public affairs. They focus as well on whether the approach to the bureaucracy presumes a relatively strong executive insisting on top-down accountability, or whether the approach builds accountability from the people—from the bottom up—and presumes a weaker executive. Hamilton believed in a strong executive managing from the top down; Jefferson argued for a weak executive held accountable from the bottom up. Madison's balance-of-powers model made the executive just one of the players, and the bureaucracy did not play a role; Wilson concentrated on the role of the permanent bureaucracy in making the case for the separation of policy and administration. Jefferson and Madison shared their concern over the broad architecture of the American system, while

TABLE 2-1 *Administrative Ideas in the American Political Tradition*

	<i>Wilsonian</i> <i>Bureaucracy-centered</i>	<i>Madisonian</i> <i>Balance-of-power-centered</i>
<i>Hamiltonian</i> <i>Strong-executive/ Top-down</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centered on executive • Principle: strong executive function • Top-down accountability • Hierarchical authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centered on non-bureaucratic institutions • Principle: separation of powers • Focus on political power • Top-down accountability
<i>Jeffersonian</i> <i>Weak-executive/ Bottom-up</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centered on local control • Principle: weak executive with devolved power • Bottom-up accountability • Responsiveness to citizens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centered on non-bureaucratic institutions • Principle: federalism • Focus on local control • Bottom-up responsiveness

Hamilton and Wilson concentrated on the mechanisms of administrative action.

As table 2-1 shows, these four traditions produced radically different, and fundamentally irreconcilable, administrative traditions. These traditions, in turn, have fueled centuries of debate and conflict in American public administration. Where should power be centered? How should executive power be balanced with other institutions? How should accountability work? The conflicting traditions have resulted in very different answers to these questions.

Americans have struggled for more than two hundred years to resolve these differences—and they have proven singularly unsuccessful in doing so. The conflicts are likely to continue as long as American democracy does because the American approach to bureaucracy embodies two important sets of tradeoffs: about how bureaucracy ought to work—from the bottom up or from the top down; and how bureaucracy ought to be integrated into American republican government—whether bureaucracy is central or peripheral. These issues shape the arguments in the chapters to come. In the meantime, three questions frame the conflict.

Administration and Hierarchy

First, *what is the role of hierarchy in public administration?* Strong bureaucracies have always built on strong hierarchies. They provide a highly

organized way of completing complex tasks—structured along a chain of command and controlled by authority. Ancient Rome's conquest of much of the Western world, and its ability to maintain control for centuries, hinged on the strength of its military power and the hierarchical structure that directed it. The Roman centurion, for example, was the linchpin of the imperial army, the critical "middle management" man in charge of 100 soldiers. The Middle Ages that followed suffered, at least in part, because that powerful arrangement disintegrated.

Since the earliest days, American public administration has always had a hierarchical structure. The structure, moreover, has built primarily on functionally organized departments—Departments of State, Treasury, War, and Post Office, with others added in the centuries since the Washington administration. As the government grew, the practice of organizing by function and managing through hierarchy became strongly entrenched. In the early years of the twentieth century, however, this foundation came under assault. Social psychologists conducted experiments that suggested hierarchy was not the only—or even the most important—tool to use in shaping administrative action. For example, researchers at Western Electric's Hawthorne plant found in the late 1920s that behavioral incentives could radically affect productivity.³¹ The Hawthorne experiments stunned managers because they established, for the first time, the case for managing complex organizations through mechanisms other than hierarchical authority. New government programs further eroded the roles of authority and hierarchy as the basic building blocks. The pragmatic demands for fighting World War II led the federal government to create GOCOs—government owned, contractor operated facilities—to manufacture weapons. The GOCO was an administrative hybrid, with the government producing goods and services through an indirect contractor network.

In the decades that followed the war, the pattern continued. In the 1950s, the federal government managed urban renewal through grants to local governments and built the Interstate Highway System through grants to state governments. It fought much of the 1960s War on Poverty through grants to local governments that ultimately went to nongovernmental organizations, like neighborhood associations. Private contractors managed most of the Medicare and Medicaid programs, while the 1970s federal effort to restore the environment operated largely through contractors and the states. In the 1990s, the federal government "ended welfare as we know it" by giving the job to the states. In fact, the federal government managed every major post-

World War II policy initiative through nonhierarchical, nonauthority-based strategies. To a lesser but still substantial degree, this movement toward using indirect tools of government spilled over into state and local governments as well.³²

These trends sharpened a tough problem: How could its hierarchically structured, authority-managed agencies effectively manage increasingly nonhierarchical, nonauthority-based administrative systems? Hierarchy and authority worked, more or less well, in an era in which the government produced most of its goods and services itself. As government employed more indirect tools, however, the management strains grew. So, too, did the challenge to ensuring the accountability of administration.

Politics and Administration

Second, *what is the linkage between politics and public administration?* Wilson's article is most famous for framing the battle lines. The question, however, dates back to Hamilton's battles with the Jeffersonians, who quarreled for decades over the proper spheres of administrative and political power. If administration is central to government, as Wilson argued in the less-cited portion of his famous paper, neither political science nor public administration can be complete without embracing the other. At least since World War II, however, political science and public administration have been on uneasy terms with each other. The public policy schools, increasingly grounded in microeconomics and policy analysis, have grown uneasy with politics. Are politics and administration truly inseparable? If so, how have analysts managed so successfully to separate them? And if they are to be joined, what linkages make the most analytical and practical sense?

The reform tradition in American politics, always bubbling but especially strong in the Progressive period, has long sought to prevent political interference in administration. Toward the end of the twentieth century, reformers led by the "reinventing government" movement sought to empower bureaucrats and, thus, to give administrators more political discretion. The field's efforts to provide prescriptions have often been ignored by politicians, while politicians have frequently criticized administrators for their inability to deliver results. Some academics, in their search for stronger predictive theory, have moved further from practical prescriptions. Other academics see little need for theoretical predictions from which pragmatic implications have been wrung. Understanding these linkages remains one of public administration's toughest problems.

Administration and the People

Third, *what is the connection between public administration and citizens?* Evidence abounds that public trust and confidence in government declined significantly in the last half of the twentieth century. In 1964, three-fourths of Americans said that they trusted government to do the right thing. By the end of the twentieth century, the number dropped to one-fourth. Cultural and political conflicts, worsened by a cynical news media, had deepened public cynicism and reduced trust.³³ Most Americans were frustrated with government, especially with its elected officials. Citizens in 1998, for example, trusted federal workers more than elected officials to do the right thing (by a margin of 67 percent to 16 percent). More citizens held a favorable view of government workers than in the past—69 percent favorable in 1998, compared with 55 percent in 1981. Nevertheless, the eroding public trust in government corroded government's ability to perform—and performance problems undermined public confidence.³⁴ Meanwhile, Robert D. Putnam wrote tellingly of the decline of “social capital” and community in American society.³⁵ How, he asked, could we rebuild the bonds between citizens and social organizations, especially government?

The trust-in-government scores shot upward in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Of those surveyed, 64 percent trusted the government in Washington to do what was right, three times the proportion in a 1994 poll.³⁶ In their heroic response to the attacks, firefighters and police officers renewed Americans' faith in at least some government workers. Analysts carefully watched the surveys to determine whether this marked the end of a decades-long slide in public trust of government or a short-lived response to the tragedy. Either way, the polls made clear, popular opinion about government was closely tied to the public's sense of how government, pragmatically and effectively, helps citizens solve problems.

ADMINISTRATION AND POLITICS

In its early years of the twentieth century, public administration sought strength by insulating itself from politics. Indeed, its leaders presented a strong public administration as a defense from corruptions of political power. By the end of the century, political problems had soiled administration along with the rest of the American political system. Politicians

have discovered great success in mounting antigovernment (read: antibureaucracy) campaigns. Reformers tried to "reinvent" bureaucracy, but they did so with unorthodox strategies and tactics. The century began and ended with a quarrelsome linkage between administration and politics, with deep uncertainty about whether both were stronger or weaker if tied together theoretically and pragmatically. Critics and analysts alike were uncertain about how administrative pathologies might have weakened public trust in politics—and how the behavior of political institutions might spawn administrative problems.

These issues are both profound and inescapable, for they lie rooted in the enduring tradeoffs of the American political traditions. The tensions have only been worsened by new trends, discussed in the next chapter, that layer new dilemmas on top of old ones. The connection between politics and administration, on one level, is clear. Without an adequate administrative foundation, bold policy ideas will fail in execution, or at least will stumble erratically in ways that further erode the public's trust in government. Theories about political relationships and institutions will be fatally flawed without an understanding of how administration shapes political possibilities and results. Moreover, in ways that even elected officials often fail to appreciate, changes in administration are redefining fundamental political relationships: between and among nation states, between the national and state and local governments; and between government and the private and non-profit sectors.

Nevertheless, both academics and politicians have lurched ahead without adequately thinking through these connections. Elected officials—and especially candidates for elected office—launch bold policy proposals without thinking through how they will carry them out. The mass media rarely hold them to account for the mismatch of their ambitions and their results, and when problems occur, they blame the administrative machinery instead of its policy designers.

Many of the key players work from a vending-machine model of public policy. They frame big ideas. They then assume that they can carry them out by putting money into the top of the machine and waiting for services to pop out the bottom. The failure of this model in describing either how public administration *does* or *should* operate helps explain the mismatch between public problems and the administration we use to solve them.

That is why reclaiming public administration is so essential. Without a theory of administration that is a theory of politics, and a theory of

politics that is informed by administration, the basic connection between citizens and their government simply cannot be understood. Meeting that challenge means grappling with the three central linkages—of administration with hierarchy, politics, and citizens. It also means understanding the fundamental transformation that occurred in governance at the end of the twentieth century and how that transformation undermined the sense of boundaries that had helped sustain public administration for a century. We turn to that puzzle next.

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30. Laurence E. Lynn Jr., *Public Management as Art, Science, and Profession* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House Publishers, 1996), 3.
31. See Lynn, *Public Management as Art, Science, and Profession*; and Behn, *Leadership Counts*.
32. See, for example, the "Symposium on the Advancement of Public Administration," *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 5 (April 1999): 119-66.
33. David Osborne and Ted Gaebler, *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit Is Transforming the Public Sector from Schoolhouse to Statehouse, City Hall to the Pentagon* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1992).
34. Personal interview with Elaine Kamarck.
35. See Donald F. Kettl, *The Global Public Management Revolution: A Report on the Transformation of Governance* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000); and Christopher Pollitt and Geert Bouckaert, *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
36. Melody Petersen and Greg Winter, "5 Drug Makers Use Material with Possible Mad Cow Link," *New York Times*, 8 February 2001, 1(C), 5(C).
37. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 289.

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2. Erna Risch, *Supplying Washington's Army* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 1981).
3. Deborah L. Spar, *Ruling the Waves: Cycles of Discovery, Chaos, and Wealth from Buccaneers to Bill Gates* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 2001).
4. David Wessel, "The Market Demands Rules," *Wall Street Journal*, 29 November 2001, 1(A).
5. Wildavsky, *The Nursing Father*, 99-106.
6. Other authors have examined the powerful influence of such traditions on American public administration. In particular, see Richard J. Stillman, chap. 7 in *The American Bureaucracy: The Core of Modern Government* (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1987).
7. See Leonard D. White, *The Federalists: A Study in Administrative History* (New York: Macmillan, 1948); Lynton K. Caldwell, *The Administrative Theories of Hamilton and Jefferson* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944); and Van Riper, "The American Administrative State," 34.
8. White, *The Federalists*, p. 127.
9. See White, *The Federalists*, chap. 8.
10. Richard Brookhiser, *Alexander Hamilton, American* (New York: Free Press, 1999), 101.

11. Ibid., 6.
12. Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), ix, 237.
13. Ibid., 237.
14. See White, *The Federalists*, 222-23. More generally on Jefferson, see Leonard D. White, *The Jeffersonians: A Study in Administrative History, 1801-1829* (New York: Macmillan, 1951).
15. White, *The Jeffersonians*, 4.
16. Ibid., 5.
17. See Brookhiser, *Alexander Hamilton, American*, 70.
18. John A. Rohr, "The Administrative State and Constitutional Principle," in Ralph Clark Chandler, ed., *A Centennial History of the American Administrative State* (New York: Free Press, 1987), 127-29. See also John A. Rohr, *To Run a Constitution: The Legitimacy of the Administrative State* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986).
19. See Van Riper, "The American Administrative State," in Chandler, ed., *A Centennial History of the American Administrative State*, 9. White's textbook is *Introduction to the Study of Public Administration*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1950).
20. Woodrow Wilson, "The Study of Administration," *Political Science Quarterly* 2 (June 1887): 197.
21. Ibid., 200-1.
22. Ibid., 200.
23. Ibid., 201.
24. Ibid., 206.
25. Ibid., 209.
26. Ibid., 210.
27. Ibid., 220.
28. See Frank J. Goodnow, *Politics and Administration: A Study in Government* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1900).
29. Woodrow Wilson, *Congressional Government: A Study in American Politics* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1885), xiii; see also Leonard D. White, *The Republican Era: 1869-1901* (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 46-48; and Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities 1877-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 42-46.
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9. For a review of the New Zealand reforms, see Jonathan Boston, John Martin, June Pallot, and Pat Walsh, *Public Management: The New Zealand Model* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1996).