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## *Foundations of Public Administration*

Managing the Executive Branch in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

*James P. Pfiffner and Mary Boardman*

*The Foundations of Public Administration Series* is a collection of articles written by experts in 20 content areas, providing introductory essays and recommending top articles in those subjects.

### **Managing the Executive Branch in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Consolidation and Disaggregation**

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The purpose of this essay is to examine the management of the executive branch from the perspective of the leading public administration scholars and their articles published in *Public Administration Review*.<sup>1</sup> We divide the major elements of executive branch management into four categories: presidential control, the merit system, structural consolidation, and management techniques. In Peri Arnold's analysis, the challenge of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was that "the disorganized elements of the growing administrative state had to be transformed into a bureaucratized administrative apparatus" (Arnold 1986, 5). That challenge was met in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The second half, however, saw the disaggregation of the executive branch and the undermining of traditional public administration principles. This essay addresses the consolidation of the executive branch into a "bureaucratized administrative apparatus" in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its disaggregation in the second half of the century.

As Richard Stillman has argued, the American people have a profound ambivalence about the American state itself (1990). At the founding of the republic in 1789, this ambivalence was reflect-

ed in the battle between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists, with the former favoring a robust Hamiltonian government and the latter favoring a minimalist and distributed Jeffersonian federation.



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The Federalists won the fight to have the new Constitution approved, but only with their agreement to limit the new government's reach with a Bill of Rights protecting individual freedom. Alexander Hamilton, who can be considered the grandfather of American public administration, declared in Federalist 70 "a government ill executed, whatever it may be in theory, must be, in practice, a bad government." His vision of the presidency was a single executive with "energy," "unity," "duration," adequate "support," and "competent powers." In the twentieth century Hamilton's vision of the chief executive was fulfilled in a powerful presidency that sometimes exceeded its constitutional bounds (Pfiffner 2008).

As the new government developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the state apparatus remained relatively small, with the original departments: War, State, and Treasury. The attorney general gained a Department of Justice only in 1870 (Van Riper 477-481). Before the end of the century, the bulk of the geographic extent of the present United States was acquired. The executive branch of government was relatively small, and policy making (except in war time) was dominated by Congress (Smith 1941). With the development of the industrial revolution, the need for a stronger and further-

reaching state apparatus became apparent. Reflecting this growth, the Department of the Interior was created in 1849 and the Pendleton Act passed in 1883.

The turn of the century was marked by a larger role for the United States in the world, with Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders in Cuba, the war in the Philippines, and the Great White Fleet circumnavigating the earth. The Progressive Era brought in government reform, the expansion of the executive branch, the creation of independent regulatory commissions, and a stronger role for the government in the economy. The Brownlow Committee Report of 1937 formally recognized the challenge of managing the executive branch and recommended giving the president the tools to bring coherence to an executive branch that had expanded considerably with the addition of New Deal agencies and programs.

World War II saw an explosion of the executive branch; in 1939 there were 900,000 civil servants and by 1945 there were 3.8 million, plus 330,000 serving without pay (Van Riper, 482). After the Korean War, federal employment decreased to 2.1 million, but by 1990 it was back up at 2.9 million, not counting the Post Office (Van Riper, 487).

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The peak of federal government coherence, with a professional civil service, covered the years from the mid 1940s to the mid 1960s. According to Van Riper's analysis "By 1945, for the first time in our history, the positive administrative state was perceived as a positive good by a large proportion of the voting public" (Van Riper 1983, 485).

That positive attitude toward the federal government began to fray in the early 1970s with the huge impact of the Vietnam War and Watergate on public attitudes toward government (Sundquist 1974). The public disenchantment was exacerbated by presidential candidates who campaigned by running against the federal government: Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan. The large entitlement programs that had been created during the Great Society (especially Medicare and Medicaid along with increases in Social Security benefits) dominated the budget; and some of the many new agencies of the War on Poverty were not well managed. These budgetary and managerial factors, aggravated by "stagflation," created political problems and prompted attempts to scale back the federal government (Pfiffner 2000). This political backlash was articulated most famously by Ronald Reagan in his first Inaugural

Address: "Government is not the solution to our problems; government is the cause" (Reagan 1981).

Though the major institutions of the federal government continue to exist in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the management of the executive branch has changed significantly. To be sure, the federal government still dominates the nation; the portion of the national economy accounted for by governmental activity has remained relatively constant; and governmental programs still affect the lives of citizens in important ways. Even so, the major elements of traditional executive branch management have been significantly altered by the following developments:

1. The White House staff has replaced cabinet secretaries in providing policy development and advice to the president. Presidential staff agencies now perform functions that used to be performed in executive branch departments.
2. Execution of public policy has shifted from management by career civil servants to control by numerous political appointees placed deeper within executive branch bureaucracies.
3. The organization of the executive branch reached a peak of coherence at mid-century, but it has since been fragmented

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by increasing political control by the White House and the contracting out of core governmental functions to the private sector.

4. The managerial approach of governmental executives has shifted from the tenets of traditional public administration to a series of management trends and techniques borrowed from the private sector.

In sum, the scope of federal government influence on the lives of Americans has increased continually since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but its coherence and accountability have been eroded.

This essay will now turn to an analysis of the development of the executive branch with traditional public administration principles and its gradual disaggregation in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The following developments will be examined.

1. From an institutional executive branch to political control by presidents.
2. From a career merit system to fragmentation and political control.
3. From centralized organization to political control and contracting out.
4. From classical public administration to business management techniques.

Each of these developments has had positive and negative dimensions. Our intent is not to decry the decline of executive branch coherence or to urge the return to any “golden era.” Our purpose, rather, is to analyze what appear to be broad trends in the executive branch of American government over the past century.

### *I. From Delegation to Centralized Presidential Control: Capacity Building*

From the 1930s through the 1950s the main purpose of executive branch reforms and reorganizations was to increase the capacity of the president to manage the increasingly large and complex federal establishment. In this process new agencies were created and the White House staff was expanded in size. The institutional and managerial capacity of the career services provided most of the analysis of policy options, with career professionals holding most of the top positions in the Bureau of the Budget (BOB) and cabinet departments. Political appointees were in control, but they worked directly with career executives to implement policies (Hecl 1979). Personal advice to the president about partisan and political aspects of government and policy was provided by a

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small number of political staffers with direct access to the president.

Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, however, presidents began to centralize control of the executive branch by increasing significantly the size and power of the White House staff. Policy advice to the president, traditionally based in the major departments, came to be dominated by parallel structures based in the Executive Office of the President (EOP). These structures were immediately responsive to presidents' political needs and were not freighted with institutionalized departmental perspectives. This section will describe the capacity-increasing reforms of executive branch departments and agencies, and then explain how advice to the president from these institutions was replaced by White House staffers in EOP units that paralleled or duplicated cabinet department capabilities.

### The Rise of Presidential Capacity

Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft had starkly different views about the role of the president in the constitutional system, with Roosevelt being an activist and Taft taking a more passive approach. Nevertheless, it became

apparent that an expanding executive branch required a stronger chief executive to bring coherence to a larger and more active government. President Taft appointed a commission to look into the budgetary process, and it recommended an executive budget. This vision came to fruition with the passage of the Budget and Accounting Act of 1921, establishing the Bureau of the Budget (BOB) (Van Riper 1983; Smith 1941). Charles Dawes, BOB's first director, turned it into a presidential staff agency that worked for the president but respected the role of Congress (Price 1951).

The Act created an executive budget that gave the president the duty to coordinate budget requests and consolidate them into a coherent proposal to Congress that would represent the policy recommendations of the president. The president was to be aided in this task by the Bureau of the Budget (with 12 staffers), which was placed in the Treasury Department, since there was no presidential executive office. By the mid-1930s, however, the scope and growth of the executive branch made it evident that the president could not manage the government without substantial staff support (Waldo and Pincus 1946).

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The next major development of the executive branch came in the mid-1930s when President Franklin Roosevelt felt the need for a greater capacity to manage the newly enlarged executive branch (Appleby 1946). His solution was to appoint three public administration scholars – Louis Brownlow, Charles Merriam, and Luther Gulick – to prepare a proposal for a significant increase in presidential authority and capacity. In its report of 1937, the Brownlow committee declared that “The President Needs Help” and recommended (among other things) that the president be provided with six professional assistants, that all executive branch agencies be brought under 12 departments, and that the Civil Service Commission be replaced with a single administrator who would report directly to the president (Brownlow 1937, 1941; Stone 1990; Benda and Levine 1986). FDR sent these proposals to Congress, but unwisely proposed increasing the size of (“packing”) the Supreme Court shortly thereafter. Interpreting these proposals as a “power grab,” Congress rejected both the Brownlow recommendations and FDR’s plan for the Supreme Court.

By the end of the 1930s, however, Congress relented and gave the president limited reorganization authority in the Executive Branch, subject to

legislative veto (Heady 1949). FDR created the fundamental basis for presidential staff agencies in Reorganization Plan No. 1 in 1939 (Pearson 1943, 1944). The executive order created the Executive Office of the Presidency, which included several agencies, but most importantly, the Bureau of the Budget (Brownlow 1941; Gulick 1941). In assisting the president, BOB coordinated the president’s budget and came to scrutinize all executive branch proposals to Congress to assure they were in tune with the president’s priorities. But just as importantly, the Administrative Management division of BOB became a major aid to the president in managing the implementation of new programs and assisting departments and agencies in improving management of existing programs (Brownlow 1936; Brownlow 1941; Gulick 1941; Stone 1990; Benda and Levine 1986; Pfiffner 1991a).

The role of the management division of BOB during the 1940s was that of rendering professional advice on management issues to the president and agencies of the executive branch (Smith 1941, 1944). Its first Director, Harold Smith, made a point of staying away from the political concerns of the president. The president’s personal staff consisted of a small number of aides (authorized by the 1939 reorganization authority) who looked

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after the political and policy interests of the president. As Elmer Staats said, the attitude of the president toward BOB was: “Give me your best professional analysis. I’ll make the political judgment” (Pfiffner 1991a, 209). This was an articulation of the normative ideal of the politics/administration dichotomy.<sup>2</sup>

The Administrative Management (AM) Division, in its role as management adviser to the president and the rest of the executive branch, helped organize and coordinate the newly created New Deal agencies, prepare for war mobilization, and aid in the creation of the Office of Strategic Services and the Air Force. After World War II it helped in the creation of the UN, the occupation of Germany, the unification of the armed services, the Marshall Plan, the creation of the CIA, and organized governmental control of atomic energy (Stone 1995, 9-17). Throughout all of this, the 1940s has been considered the “golden age” of professional management advice to the president. This is because not only was BOB the only significant staff capacity available to the president, but also because the president respected its professionalism and management advice while preferring to get political advice from his small cohort of personal assistants in the White House (Neustadt 1990, 218-222).

After the 1939 creation of the Executive Office of the President, the next major executive branch reorganization was the National Defense Act of 1947. The Act gathered the military services into the Department of Defense, created the Central Intelligence Agency, and created the National Security Council (NSC). Each of these organizations was to grow to be among the most powerful units in the United States Government. The NSC operation was at first coordinated by a single administrative director who was not concerned with policy decisions but coordinated policy advice to the president from his White House Staff and the Departments of State and Defense. The NSC staff later grew to include more than 100 professional personnel.

In the 1950s President Eisenhower used BOB for budget cutting but neglected BOB’s management capacity, while beginning to institutionalize the presidency. He created the position of chief of staff to the president, the staff secretary, the Office of Legislative Liaison, and a formalized national security policy making process. Eisenhower used his cabinet as a deliberative body and delegated a significant amount of discretion to individual cabinet secretaries. Then, in the 1960s, Presidents Kennedy and Johnson began to centralize policy

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making in the White House. President Nixon later greatly enhanced that capacity by increasing the size of the White House staff and creating parallel organizations so that he was not dependent on the departments and agencies.

### The Decline of Institutional Capacity

A key aspect of the decline of cabinet secretaries as the primary advisors to the president involved the expansion of White House staff agencies and a corresponding unwillingness of presidents to rely on executive branch line agencies for policy advice. What had begun as an attempt to give the president a staff capacity to provide advice and help manage the executive branch, turned into a large “presidential branch” that brought departmental functions into White House organizations that dominated the executive branch (Hart 1987).

This centralizing trend began in the 1960s, but it clearly gained major momentum in the 1970s with the increasing size of the White House staff, the creation of new White House agencies, and the centralization of control of the executive branch within the White House staff. The last section analyzed the growth of executive branch capacity; this section will examine how presidents centra-

lized their personal control of the government and decreased the policy development role of traditional departments and agencies.

John Kennedy’s searing experience with the Bay of Pigs disaster prompted him to ask McGeorge Bundy to create a “Little State Department” in the White House so that he would not be so dependent on the Departments of State, Defense, and the CIA, whom he believed had given him bad advice about the Cuban exiles’ invasion of Cuba in 1961. In addition to this, Lyndon Johnson increased White House involvement in military tactics by personally choosing bombing targets during the Vietnam War and using his White House staff to design the many initiatives of the Great Society. It was Richard Nixon, however, who created much of the White House bureaucracy that continues to exist and grow into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Nixon held a deep distrust of the career bureaucracies within the executive branch; particularly the State Department which he felt had snubbed him when he was Vice President. He thought that career civil servants were “dug-in establishmentarians fighting for the status quo” and who would undermine his policies by dragging their feet and



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sabotage (Pfiffner 1996, 74). His first and most far-reaching change was to designate Henry Kissinger as his national security adviser and instruct him to centralize control of policy making in the White House. Kissinger recruited a talented group of staffers for the NSC staff and strove to shut out the State Department from high-level policy advice to the president. Nixon thus had the staff capacity to develop foreign policy in the White House with his personal staff rather than having to depend on the Departments of State and Defense as had previously been necessary. As a consequence, the major foreign initiatives of the Nixon administration – the SALT I talks, the opening to China, and the Paris Peace talks – were all run from the White House rather than with the participation of the State Department as would previously have been necessary.

Nixon initiated a parallel move in the domestic policy arena. In Reorganization Plan No. 2 of 1970, he created the Domestic Policy Council, which played a role similar to the NSC, but with respect to domestic policy (Nixon 1970). Nixon designated White House aide John Ehrlichman as his domestic policy adviser. Ehrlichman recruited more than 50 staffers to work on domestic policy development. Thus the White House contained

what Ehrlichman called a “counter bureaucracy” that would do the president’s bidding and conduct “bureaucratic warfare” with the departments and agencies of the executive branch.

President Nixon also reorganized the Bureau of the Budget into the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in order to enhance his control of the executive branch. In doing so, he created the political positions of Program Assistant Directors, who were placed at deeper levels of the organization and had much closer control of executive branch departments and agencies (Arnold 2007). He also used OMB personnel to carry out his impoundment of funds that had been appropriated by Congress for programs of which he disapproved, a practice later struck down by the Supreme Court (Pfiffner 1979). When President Carter came to office, he added a new level of political appointees, two Executive Associate Directors. As a result, OMB was much more closely controlled by the political appointees of the president than it had been in the 1950s when the deputy director was almost always drawn from BOB career ranks.

Presidential appointments have always been made by the president, with the consent of the Senate, as

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the Constitution provides. But for practical purposes, presidents were dependent on their political parties and co-partisans in Congress to suggest nominees. In his first term, President Nixon delegated the choice of high-level, sub-cabinet appointments to the Secretaries of the Departments and agencies. But Nixon came to believe that his political appointees, even his personally chosen cabinet secretaries, did not sufficiently support Nixon's own political interests. In addition, his sub-cabinet appointees seemed to be loyal to their cabinet secretaries (and congressional supporters) rather than to the president. Thus in his second term he told Fred Malek to form a White House Personnel Office to recruit and vet all presidential appointees and to make sure that presidential interests took precedence over those of cabinet secretaries.

This office was the precursor of what is now known as the Office of Presidential Personnel (OPP) within the EOP. During his transition in 1981, President Reagan increased the size of OPP to more than 100 staffers and instructed it to control not only presidential appointees (PAS), but also non-career Senior Executive Service (SES) and Schedule C (GS 15 and below) appointments. Subsequent presidents have continued to re-create

this White House office at the beginning of their administrations. Thus the president no longer has to depend on Congress, the political party, or cabinet secretaries for recruiting political personnel; that capacity now exists in the White House itself.

In addition to retaining OPP, other White House offices were also created for centralizing purposes. The White House Communications office now monopolizes major news from the executive branch. The United State Trade Representative in the EOP now dominates trade policy, rather than the Departments of State, Commerce, Agriculture, etc. The White House office of political affairs now dominates the president's political party, and the national committees of the two parties (DNC and RNC) no longer have much of an independent political voice when the president is of their party.

The consequences of these developments have given each president along with their White House staffers an independent capacity to dominate policy making. Departments and agencies, of course, still play important roles and actually implement presidential policies; but their roles have been substantially reduced. Similarly, career civil servants who used to be able to aspire to the level of depu-

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ty assistant secretary and sometimes even assistant secretary positions in departments, now hit a ceiling at lower levels in the hierarchy of the executive branch. This has encouraged presidents to act based on advice primarily from their own political appointees and to neglect the advice of the career services, sometimes to the detriment of sound public policy.

Thus the institutional capacity of departments and agencies has been sidelined by offices in the EOP. The advice and judgment of career professionals is less important to presidential decision-making. For instance, President George W. Bush relied on his political appointees in much of his most important policy-making, particularly decision making about the war in Iraq (Pfiffner 2007). Although the role of the department and agencies is still crucial to the government, their role has been diminished by the growth of the White House staff, the organizational capacity of the EOP, the domination of the top levels in each department by an increased number of political appointees, and the contracting out of many functions that were previously carried out by government employees in the executive branch of government. The next sections will examine developments in political-career relations, the organization of the

executive branch, and the changing approaches to managing the executive branch.

### *II. The Merit System and Political Control*

Tension between political control and partisan neutrality in the management of the executive branch has characterized American government since the Jacksonian era. The consensus that the Federalist elite were best able to carry out governmental programs in the early decades of the Republic was challenged by President Jackson's preference for the common person and partisan supporters. The Jacksonian revolution led to the spoils system, which maximized political loyalty and responsiveness but sacrificed competence and neutrality. To remedy this, the Pendleton Act of 1883 established the merit system, which was intended to replace the politics of the spoils system with the neutral competence of civil servants. The merit system focused on professional administration that entails continuity and expertise, while the executive layers of political appointees are focused on political and democratic priorities, bringing energy and responsiveness to the government (Aberbach and Rockman 1988).

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Political control of executive branch policy has always been appropriate for a democratic republic. The change from the first half to the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, is that political control is now exercised at lower levels in the executive branch and involves the implementation of public policy as well as its formulation. This section will examine the development of the merit system from the Pendleton Act through its broadest coverage and legitimacy, which peaked in the 1950s. The consensus on the scope of government and its purposes began to break down in the 1960s and 1970s, leading to presidential doubts about the responsiveness of career civil servants (Pfiffner 1996). The response by presidents was to increase the number of political appointees and to place them deeper into the executive branch bureaucracy in order to enhance personal presidential control. At the same time exceptions to Title V began to fragment the civil service, and contractors began to perform the functions that had traditionally been carried out by civil servants.

We begin by analyzing the growth of the merit system and its institutionalization; we then examine the consequences of politicization for the capacity of the government over the past several decades.

### The Rise of the Merit System

The Pendleton Act of 1883 created the Civil Service Commission (CSC), which was to be bipartisan, with its chair appointed by the president. Recruitment of personnel shifted from political agency heads to the non-partisan central personnel agency, the CSC. It required that appointments to government agencies be made on the basis of skills, experience, and abilities, and it forbade appointment on the basis of partisanship. Just as personnel could not be appointed or promoted for partisan reasons, neither could they be fired for arbitrary or political reasons. Also, political superiors could no longer compel a subordinate to participate in political activities or assess part of the subordinate's pay for party coffers.

The intent of the merit system was that recruitment and promotion would be based on ability rather than partisan affiliation and that there would be no partisan interference with merit system personnel decisions. These protections for civil servants were based upon the assumption that the civil service would work with equal enthusiasm for whichever political party was in power. That is, government workers would be neutral with respect to party and competent with respect to

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their jobs. This ideal of neutral competence was the hallmark of the civil service (Hecl 1999).

The merit system, as established by the Pendleton Act of 1883, was based on the foundation of three principles: 1) entry to the system by way of competitive examination, 2) promotion and penalty based on performance, and 3) protection from actions based on partisan political pressure. In the years since its establishment, many refinements and additions have been overlaid on the merit system (Ingraham 1995, 57-58).

Although it covered only 12% of the federal workforce in the beginning, the merit system's scope was gradually expanded and its requirements refined. By the time of Theodore Roosevelt (who had been chair of the Civil Service Commission), coverage had increased to about 50%, and by 1930 80% were covered by the merit system. The Ramspeck Act of 1940 later increased coverage to approximately 95% of government workers under the merit system (Van Riper 1983, p. 483).

The Classification Act of 1923 instituted the standardization of jobs across the government. The purpose was to ensure that people performing similar functions, though in different agencies, would

have similar rank and pay, reducing some of the arbitrariness of separate pay and ranking systems in different agencies. In 1937 the Brownlow Committee recommended that one presidential appointee should replace the bipartisan Civil Service Commission, but Congressional hesitation to give FDR more power defeated the proposal. (The proposed change would not be made until the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978.) In addition, the Hatch Act of 1939 formally prohibited partisan political activities by civil servants or partisan pressure from political appointees.

World War II increased federal employment from 900,000 to 3.8 million. After this jump in government employment, the Hoover Commission of 1949 took a broad look at organization, personnel, and management issues. The Commission issued 277 recommendations on a wide range of managerial issues and was successful in winning adoption of more than half of them by Congress. Also, in 1955, former President Hoover headed a second commission that made more than 300 recommendations for savings. The bulk of the recommendations were in line with the managerial thrust of the first commission, though fewer of them were adopted. Both Hoover Commissions were critical of the size of the government and

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were based on traditional public administration principles of the administrative presidency (Moe 1994; Moe & Gilmour 1995).

The growth of the civil service between the 1930s and the 1960s reflected the much larger role of the federal government. With this growth, the national government became much more professionalized and institutionalized. However the legitimacy enjoyed by the civil service and its increased size also led to the increased rigidity of processes and procedures. The Civil Service Commission became the central policy maker for personnel administration and the central clearinghouse for recruitment for government workers. Thus the consensus on the role of the government and success of the CSC in institutionalizing the public service contained the seeds of disintegration as the role of government was expanded in the 1960s and questioned in the 1970s (Pfiffner and Brook 2000).

Although consensus on the value and role of the civil service marked the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, harbingers of change existed. One of the early arguments for more political control came from Paul Appleby in the 1940s. He suggested that the bureaucracy did not manage programs as effectively

as it could or should, and that much of this was caused by cabinet secretaries. Instead of working together to achieve the President's goals, cabinet members often competed with each other and against the president. According to Appleby, cabinet members should cooperate to accomplish governmental goals rather than acting as advocates for their own department (Appleby 1946). In 1947 Appleby also made an argument for placing political appointees deeper within executive branch agencies to ensure political responsiveness. He argued that a politically responsible bureaucracy is more democratic and that administrators should have a generalist perspective rather than narrowly focusing on their own areas of expertise.

President Eisenhower made an important change after the Republican presidential victory in 1952. Although he valued the professionalism of the career services (military and civilian), the Republican Party was starved for patronage over the previous two decades of Democratic control of the executive branch. Eisenhower also thought that the career civil service was filled with New Dealers who would not be sympathetic to a new Republican administration. The solution to the perceived problem was to create a new category of political appointees who would be placed lower in the bu-

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reaucratic hierarchy (GS 15 and below). The initial allocation of “Schedule Cs” was 200, but in later decades, the number would increase significantly, and their roles would expand.

### The Decline of the Career System and the Rise of Political Control

During the post-1950s era, presidents felt that the traditional norms of neutral competence did not provide them with sufficient responsiveness to their personal and policy priorities. They preferred “responsive competence,” which implied more enthusiasm for their own policy and political agendas (Aberbach and Rockman 1988). Thus from the 1960s on, career personnel in the executive branch came under increasing control by political appointees. The main changes over this era include the 1978 Civil Service Reform Act, the fragmentation of the civil service through exemptions from Title V, the increasing number of political appointees, White House control of political appointees through the Office of Presidential Personnel, the National Performance Review, and the Bush era changes in the management structure of the personnel system.

Presidents Kennedy and Johnson felt that the career civil service was not creative and bold enough to create the new policies they favored for the “New Frontier” and the “Great Society.” Their solution was to increase the role of the White House staff in advising the president on policy making. President Nixon increased the centralization of White House staff control of administration, because he distrusted civil servants who he thought were trying to thwart presidential priorities. One of the responses of the Nixon administration was to place political appointees deeper into the bureaucracy and to create (sometimes illegally) political clearance systems for career promotions (Ingraham et al. 1995; Pfiffner 1987).

When he came to office, President Carter undertook to reform the civil service, and he pushed the Civil Service Reform Act (CSRA) through Congress in 1978. Among other things the CSRA created the Senior Executive Service of about 7,000 positions at the top of the career ladder in the executive branch. More political control was provided by allowing ten percent of the SES to be politically appointed. CSRA also provided authority for presidents to move career SES members to different positions easily, and agency heads could place political appointees into any position

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not specifically designated as “career reserved.” (Ingraham et. al. 1995; Ink 2000). In addition, CSRA made it easier to hire and fire civil servants.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the number of political appointees was increasing, and they were being placed at lower levels in the bureaucracy in order to facilitate more political control. By the 1990s the number of Schedule Cs had increased to about 1,700; non-career SES positions totaled about 700 (of a total of 7,000), and PAS positions amounted to 523. The positions of deputy assistant secretary in the departments that had been filled with career employees up through the 1960s, were now dominated by political appointees (Pfiffner 1987, 58). Joel Aberbach and Bert Rockman argued for a balance between the political levels in the executive branch and career professionals: “Politics provides energy and revitalization while bureaucracy brings continuity, knowledge, and stability. One can exist without the other but only to the detriment of effective government” (Aberbach & Rockman 1988, p.608). The National Commission on the Public Service (the Volcker Commission) in 1989 recommend a significant cut in the number of political appointees in the executive branch, but presidents are unlikely to ever favor such a change that would decrease their patronage

and political control (National Commission on the Public Service 1989; Richardson and Pfiffner 1989).

At the same time that presidents were gaining more control over the top levels of the career ranks, they also gained increased capacity to recruit political appointees. Recruitment of political appointees had traditionally been relatively informal, and often dominated by political parties and members of Congress. President Nixon created the first White House Personnel Office for the purpose of professionalizing and centralizing political recruitment.

The Reagan administration then made a major leap when the president’s political recruiter was given the status of assistant to the president for presidential personnel who headed an office with 100 staffers at the beginning of the administration. In addition to tightly controlling presidential appointments, the Reagan Office of Presidential Personnel asserted its control over non-career SES and Schedule C appointments, which had traditionally been made at the discretion of department and agency heads. Career civil servants saw increasing power and control going to political appointees to the exclusion of career executives



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(Stehr 1997). Subsequent presidents continued the centralized control of political appointments, and overall, this led to increased political control over the management of the executive branch.

As political control of the executive branch was increasing through White House domination of appointments, the civil service system began to be fragmented. The traditional standard for the merit system in the federal government has been the inclusion of employees in the “competitive service” who are subject to appointment under chapter 33 of Title V of the U.S. Code (GAO 1997; Ingraham 1995, 34). Title V of the United States Code specifies the rules and regulations of the national civil service system, but in the latter decades of the twentieth century, the system began to be disintegrated as the coverage of Title V was decreased.

Since the 1950s peak of 95 percent, coverage of the traditional merit system, (i.e. the competitive service) dropped to 52 percent in 1996 (GAO 1997, 11). The rest of federal government employees are in “excepted service,” meaning not covered by the hiring authority of Title V, though all agencies had their own personnel systems which conformed to merit principles. For instance, the U.S. Postal Service established its own personnel sys-

tem when it left the competitive service in 1970. The Foreign Service has its own system, as do the intelligence gathering agencies. In all, 123 organizations of the federal government employ people in excepted services (GAO 1997, p.5). The fragmenting trend continued with the Federal Aviation Administration receiving authority to set up its own system in 1995. Since the CSRA of 1978 the Office of Personnel Management delegated authority to departments and agencies, and by 1998 virtually all hiring has been decentralized and the central registers of OPM no longer exist.<sup>3</sup>

When it came to office, the Clinton administration initiated the National Performance Review (NPR) and argued that traditional paradigm of government management was encrusted with too many rules and regulations that prevented government managers from using their discretion. The system already in place was designed during the industrial revolution and modeled on large-scale bureaucracy with hierarchical control from the top down, in order to ensure responsiveness to law and adherence to policy. But the NPR argued that this system was now cumbersome and outmoded and should be replaced with a management structure appropriate for the information age (Gore 1994; Kamensky 1996).

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The NPR encompassed a wide range of management reforms that had broad effects on the public service. While the intention was to change the culture of government organizations and transform them into entrepreneurial, creative, and customer driven organizations, the success of moving in these directions was decreased by the budget-driven mandate to reduce significantly the number of employees of the federal government. The Clinton administration cuts of more than 300,000 positions brought the size of the civilian component of the federal government down to the smallest it had been since the Kennedy administration. These cuts were more than made up in the increased contracting for government services (covered in the next section).

President George W. Bush attempted the most sweeping changes in the Civil Service System in a half century and possibly since the creation of the merit system (Brook and King 2007, 31). In addition to the familiar complaints about the traditional civil service rules, the Bush administration capitalized on the tragedies of 9/11 to promote the need for personnel reform. The administration argued that in the new post-9/11 world of the war on terror, personnel systems involving national

security had to be nimble in responding to new threats, and this meant giving managers more flexibility in deploying the workforce to fight the war on terror. The combining of personnel management reform with national security concerns after 9/11 provided the necessary impetus for passage of personnel reform that had been stymied before 9/11 (Brook and King 2007, 97).

The criticisms of the traditional personnel process that spurred the arguments for reform were similar to the complaints about the Civil Service System that led to the 1978 Civil Service Reform Act and subsequent reform proposals. These arguments generally were that the system was too cumbersome – too difficult to hire the best and too many impediments to firing the worst. It was said that pay was based on time in position rather than on job performance, and rules did not provide enough flexibility to reward the best performers.

Specific provisions of the personnel reform initiatives in DHS and in the civilian sector of DOD under the National Security Personnel System (NSPS) emphasized managerial flexibility. The 15 grade General Schedule would be thrown out and replaced with a more flexible system based on pay

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for performance. The administration hoped that the new regulations would provide a template for personnel reform throughout the rest of the executive branch. The new systems that were initiated covered the Department of Homeland Security, which has about 170,000 personnel, and the Department of Defense, which included about 750,000 personnel.

The general principles upon which the personnel reforms were based include:

- Positions organized in broad career groups rather than narrow classification.
- Pay aligned in broad bands rather than the more rigid General Schedule.
- Pay based on performance rather than on time in position.
- Performance evaluation based on clear criteria.
- A streamlined hiring process responsive to labor markets.
- An expedited disciplinary and appeals process.
- More managerial flexibility in implementing collective bargaining agreements.

The Bush administration insisted that the new system would not change any fundamental merit principles or rules against prohibited personnel practices; it would not change anti-discrimination

laws or veterans' preference; nor would it lead to any immediate reductions in force.

Difficulties arose when the general authority to create the new systems was turned over to the political leadership in DHS and DOD where the details of personnel reform with respect to merit system protections and union rights needed to be hammered out. Negotiations over the specific provisions of the personnel regulations delayed the expected implementation of the reforms, and the provisions affecting collective bargaining rights met roadblocks in federal courts. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ruled that the sweeping provision allowing any bargaining contract provisions to be overridden by agency head directives contravened the "Act's mandate that DHS 'ensure' collective bargaining rights for its employees" (Weiss 2006). Thus, the full impact of the Bush reforms on the civil service were not entirely clear at the end of his administration.

### *III. Organization of the Executive Branch*

The executive branch "...along with the Constitution is the central means of governance in society" (Stillman 1987, p.6). After slow growth in the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) was established in 1887. According to Dwight Waldo, its creation "signaled the passage of the United States from a simple, agricultural society into a highly complex and interrelated Great Society" (1948, 1984, p.8). An expanding federal government was necessary to temper and control the business expansion that accompanied the industrial revolution. Large-scale organizations required professional management that could be organized only with bureaucratic principles. Woodrow Wilson attempted to make bureaucracy, with its specialization and expertise, compatible with democracy by separating politics from administration. His seminal article articulated some of the key principles that would be integrated into the nascent field of public administration in the 1930s (White 1926; Wilson 1887; Stillman 1987).

This section will trace the growth of organizational development of the growing executive branch for the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and then dis-

cuss its gradual disaggregation through the fragmentation of Title V and the outsourcing of public administration. Since the growth of bureaucracy made possible large-scale government, its organizational structure will be examined first. The later decline of administrative coherence can be seen in the reorganization projects and commissions that recommended more political control over the agencies of the federal government and eventually the performance of governmental tasks by organizations in the private sector. Contracting for the performance of governmental functions continues apace in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and creating the capacity to oversee the thousands of contracts presents a major challenge to the government of the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some of these post-Brownlow reorganizations of the executive branch were undertaken to appeal to a public skeptical about the national government. As Peri Arnold has observed, these activities amounted to "politics without governance" (Arnold 1986, 336).

#### The Organizational Development of the Executive Branch

A major function of governmental organizations in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was to ensure that unbridled capitalism did not exploit workers exces-

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sively and that true competition was maintained in the market place (Stillman 1987). The constrained approach to executive branch functions in the 19<sup>th</sup> century became considerably expanded by the governmental response to the Great Depression. The rapid growth of the government both in numbers of agencies and the number of workers in them became the concern of public administration as the field became professionalized.

The Brownlow Committee Report and the *Papers on the Science of Administration* represented the “high noon of orthodoxy” in public administration thinking about the structure of government (Gulick and Urwick 1937). The 1937 report noted the increasing responsibilities of the federal government and stressed the need for coherence and presidential leadership. When its recommendation for reorganization authority for the president was finally granted in 1939, the groundwork was laid for controlling and leading the large bureaucracies of the executive branch. Roosevelt used his newly granted authority to create the Executive Office of the President (EOP), which brought together the management functions of budgeting, planning, and organizing into the White House (Brownlow 1941). Organizationally, the Bureau of the Budget (BOB) was greatly strengthened by being brought into the EOP (Smith 1941). The new BOB also

advised the president on management and organization issues in addition to its budgetary role (Pearson 1943).

Then, in 1940, the American Society for Public Administration was founded. Later, in 1941, Brownlow explained how centralized control related to accountability in one of the first issues of its new journal, *Public Administration Review*. He argued that, “as the responsibilities of government increased, the legislature lost its ability to take a coherent view of the state of the nation, because it had not permitted the executive to develop its management controls over the departments of government” (Brownlow 1941, 103-104). Although Congress authorizes executive agencies and provides the resources for programs to operate, the president has to provide coherence and control in order to achieve accountability.

One of the early scholars of public administration, Paul Appleby, recognized the value of delegation of authority, but he argued that authority had to be centralized first (1946). He reasoned that separate agencies competing for their own programs and resources needed to be reined in by one central authority in the presidency (Appleby 1947). The argument that administrative power could

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only be accountable if the departments and agencies were arranged in a hierarchy responsive to the president was echoed by Ronald Moe late in the century after the executive branch had been undergoing fragmentation for several decades (1990).

Ronald Moe argued that to achieve coherence, Congress must create executive branch organizations that are answerable to the president through line officers, that is, cabinet secretaries. Management should be exercised in accord with generic management laws, rather than fragmenting authority by granting special exceptions that respond to temporary political pressures (Moe 1990). Norton Long also warned in 1949 that central accountability should not be confused with central planning and that the government had to be aware of and eventually accountable to the citizens of the nation (Long 1949).

The Hoover Commission of 1949 reflected the public administration consensus on organization and management. It argued that the diffusion of the many agencies of the executive branch undermined the president's ability to manage the executive branch after World War II. The Commission also argued that professionalism in public administration was a priority and that the distinction be-

tween line and staff officers of the government was crucial (Hoover Commission 1949). Thus the president's White House advisers perform staff rather than line functions and should not be subject to Senate confirmation.

The Commission also argued that departments should be organized according to function, that department heads should have control over departmental organization, and that Congress should not meddle with the internal organization of departments. The Commission thus urged Congress to give the president increased authority to reorganize the executive branch (Heady 1949). The reorganization bill took five months to get through Congress, and the Senate prevailed in its insistence on a single-house legislative veto for presidential reorganization plans<sup>4</sup>. The Commission also proposed that the newly created Secretary of Defense needed to have budgetary control of the military services. In addition to this, the second Hoover Commission of 1955 suggested that the management functions of the BOB be increased substantially (Benda and Levine 1986).

Despite many exceptions, the 1940s and 1950s saw the peak of organizational coherence of the executive branch, managed with the classical principles

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of Public Administration. The rest of the century saw the tightening of political control of the executive branch, followed by its slow disaggregation due to the contracting with the private sector to implement governmental purposes.

### The Decline of Organizational Coherence

After the 1960s, presidents tried to gain political control over the executive branch by making political appointments in departments and agencies and creating parallel organizations in the White House. This politicization continued, and in the 1980s, contracting out governmental functions gained political popularity and was carried out at an increasing pace through the George W. Bush administration.

President Johnson and Congress, through his Great Society and War on Poverty initiatives, created many new programs and agencies in the executive branch. The large increases in spending and the problems in managing some of the programs led to President Nixon's attempts to centralize his control of the executive branch. Nixon came to office with a preference for organizational symmetry and a severe distrust of the career public servants in executive branch bureaucracies. His

reorganizations and proposals emphasized a tighter span of control and more political responsiveness to him and his White House staff.

While the size, complexity, and scope of the government had been increasing, Nixon felt that the presidency was not keeping pace with the need to manage the government (Nixon 1970). The President's Advisory Council on Executive Organization, led by Roy Ash, was asked to present recommendations to make the executive branch run more smoothly. Following the advice of the Ash Council Nixon implemented Reorganization Plan No. 2 of 1970. This was an attempt to reorganize the executive branch along traditional management principles (Moe 1990).

According to Nixon, improving management of the EOP would help to also improve the management of the Executive Branch as a whole:

*A President whose programs are carefully coordinated, whose information system keeps him adequately informed, and whose organizational assignments are plainly set out, can delegate authority with security and confidence. A President whose office is deficient in these respects will be inclined, instead, to retain close control of operating responsibilities which he cannot and should not handle. (Nixon 1970, 612).*

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Although Nixon articulated traditional tenets of public organization well, his desire for political control over the executive branch overwhelmed his call for delegation. His distrust of career civil servants was exacerbated by suspicions that even his own political appointees were not sufficiently committed to his political goals and reelection (Pfiffner 1996, 41-45).

This distrust led to the centralization of foreign policy making in the National Security Council and the creation of the Domestic Policy Council to draw domestic policy making away from departments and agencies and into the White House. Nixon completed the reorganization of BOB into OMB so that it could more effectively ensure that the departments and agencies of the executive branch implemented the president's political and policy priorities (Benda and Levine 1986; Carey 1970)

After Reorganization Plan No. 2, Nixon submitted further plans to reorganize the Executive Branch that were the most comprehensive in the nation's history. Nixon's grand plan to reorganize the executive branch called for the duties of the departments of Interior, Commerce, Labor, HUD, HEW, and Transportation to be subsumed

into four functionally oriented super-departments of Natural Resources, Human Resources, Economic Affairs, and Community Development (Benda & Levine 1986; Fox 1973). All of these plans collapsed when the Nixon administration was overtaken by Watergate. Thus the traditional public administration organizational principles that Nixon began with were undermined by his need for political control of the government.

When President Carter came to office he established the President's Reorganization Project. This did not reflect traditional public administration principles but rather an eclectic and "bottom-up" approach to the structure of the executive branch. The major executive branch reorganizations of the Carter administration were the placement of two Executive Associate Directors immediately beneath the Director of OMB as well as the creation of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). While OMB's political management staff increased by 32 positions, its total workforce declined by about 20% (Benda and Levine 1986, 385). CSRA abolished the three person Civil Service Commission and replaced it with OPM, with its director reporting directly to the president. This, along with the creation of the SES, led to important increases in the president's control of the executive



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branch. The Departments of Education and Energy were also created during the Carter administration.

President Reagan asserted strong control of the executive branch, particularly insisting that all political appointees, from PAS to Schedule C, be cleared through the Office of Presidential Personnel in the White House. He established the President's Private-Sector Survey on Cost Control, known as the Grace Commission after its director, business executive Peter J. Grace. The commission based its recommendations on private sector management principles rather than traditional public administration and claimed that billions of dollars could be saved if its policies to root out "waste, fraud, and abuse" were followed (Moe 1990). The recommendations, however, were hostile to the public service and greatly exaggerated potential savings, which were often based on policy changes rather than managerial efficiencies. Its impact on the federal government was not significant.

Problems with political control, low pay, and lack of professional development in the civil service prompted the creation of the National Commission on the Public Service (the Volcker Commis-

sion). In 1989, the privately funded Commission made several recommendations in its report, *Leadership for America*. The report argued that the increasing numbers of political appointees were actually counterproductive to presidential control of the executive branch and recommended cutting their numbers from about 3,000 to about 2,000. Shortly after its report pay was increased for federal executives and the OPM took its proposals for education and training seriously. Its proposal for cutting the numbers of political appointees, however, was ignored.

When President Clinton came to office, he delegated to Vice President Gore leadership for the National Performance Review (NPR). The NPR leadership argued that the public administration paradigm of government management was formed during the progressive era and modeled on large-scale bureaucracy with hierarchical control from the top to ensure responsiveness to law and adherence to policy. However, this system was now cumbersome and outmoded and should be replaced with a management structure appropriate for the information age.

The information age at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, argued the NPR, needed more flexible organiza-

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tions with flatter structures that could respond creatively to the challenges of changing technology and global competition. The proponents of the NPR argued that government should “steer rather than row.” That is, government should not produce goods and services directly, but rather set up incentive systems that encourage citizens to do things themselves and use contracting to take advantages of market incentives.

The NPR encompassed a wide range of management reforms and had broad effects on the public service. While the intention was to change the culture of government organizations and transform them into entrepreneurial, creative, and customer driven organizations, the success of moving in these directions was compromised by the budget-driven mandate to reduce significantly the number of employees of the federal government. The Clinton administration cuts of more than 300,000 positions significantly reduced the size of the federal workforce and made necessary the contracting out of many government tasks.

The George W. Bush administration intensified the push for private businesses and non-profits to carry out the functions of government that had been emphasized in the Reagan and Clinton ad-

ministrations. After September 11, there was interest again in governmental reorganization. The Bush administration and Congress created the Transportation Security Agency (TSA), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the Office of National Intelligence. The Director of National Intelligence replaced the Director of CIA as coordinator of national intelligence functions. The melding of 22 agencies with 170,000 employees into the DHS with a \$40 billion budget was the largest reorganization since the National Security Act of 1947.

### The Private Execution of Public Functions

Arguably the most important transformation in the federal government’s use of personnel since the establishment of the merit system has been the contracting out of governmental functions to the private sector. As a consequence, the federal government’s ability to control governmental functions has been diminished (Light 2006). Not only has the government expanded the contractor workforce, but it also often did this at the same time that it was reducing federal employment (Igraham 2005). Government agencies have become increasingly dependent on private contractors that are often performing inherently governmental functions, and the ability of the govern-

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ment to monitor the thousands of contracts continues to be a major challenge.

Although contracting for goods and services is as old as the Republic, contracting out as a matter of principle increased significantly in the 1980s and 1990s. This occurred first under President Reagan's anti-government convictions and later pursuant to President Clinton's National Performance Review (Pfiffner 1997, 1999). Even so, the government did not eliminate functions or programs, it merely reduced the number of people directly employed by the government and contracted the same functions out to private and non-profit organizations (Light 1999).

Since the most visible and easily understandable sign of big government is the number of public employees, the easiest way to reduce the visibility of big government and to claim credit for shrinking the government is to reduce the number of public employees. The NPR under Gore and Clinton argued for a government that is smaller and costs less. They "delivered" on their promise by cutting the size of the federal civil service by more than 300,000 between 1993 and 1998. This was a reduction in the federal civilian workforce (excluding the Postal Service) of 15.4% (Kettl

1998, 18). However the reality is that these cuts have contributed to a government that may appear smaller but continues to deliver the level of services that Americans demand (Light 1999).

The George W. Bush administration accelerated the trend by mandating that hundreds of thousands of government jobs in the civilian and defense sectors be considered for contracting out. The administration increased the number of government employees, and at the same time increased contracting out for governmental services, particularly security and military functions. The United States occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan included 196,000 private contractors, more than the number of U.S. troops in those countries of 182,000 (Lardner 2008). Among the contractors were 20-30,000 personnel who provided "security" forces who carried weapons and use lethal force.

Managing contractors is more difficult than managing public employees because there is no hierarchical relationship, and contracts are subject to the principle/agent problem (Prager 1994). When public agencies delegate functions to private entities, much of public accountability is lost (Gilmour & Jensen 1998). Problems of accountability and control are particularly acute when military

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functions are contracted out; the government no longer has a monopoly on the legitimate use of deadly force. Contractors are not subject to the military chain of command, nor to the Uniform Code of Military Justice. If a mission seems too risky, a contractor can decide not to undertake it. In addition, legal control is ambiguous. For instance, most translators and interrogators at Abu Ghraib were employed by the contractors Titan and CACI, and they were involved in 36 percent of the incidents of abuse at Abu Ghraib (Singer 2005, 126).

The problem of accountability was illustrated when the security contracting firm, Blackwater, was involved in an incident in Baghdad in which 17 Iraqis were killed. The Iraqi government demanded that Blackwater leave the country, and the FBI began an investigation. But after intense lobbying, the State Department renewed its contract with Blackwater in May 2008. The State Department said that only two other companies had the capacity to provide the 800 guards for American diplomats in Iraq, though it did not approach them for bids for the contract. Undersecretary of State for Management, Patrick F. Kennedy, admitted that “We cannot operate without private security firms in Iraq. If the contractors

were removed, we would have to leave Iraq” (Risen 2008). This Blackwater affair illustrates the reality that contracting does not necessarily bring the benefits of competition and that it is difficult to hold contracting firms accountable. The government has become so dependent on individual contractors that it often has no practical option but to renew contracts even if the goods or services provided are not acceptable (Lardner Year?). In testimony before Congress deputy undersecretary of defense for logistics and materiel readiness, Jack Bell, said that contractors “have become part of our total force.” He admitted that the military has been unable to fully supervise the many thousands of contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan. “We were not adequately prepared to address this unprecedented scale of our dependence on contractors (Pincus 2008).”

Contracting can also lead to problem with military morale, since contractors often get paid significantly more than soldiers. Seasoned and well-trained military personnel are tempted to abandon military careers and take their costly training with them to work for much higher pay at private security firms. As Singer points out: contractors “use public funds to offer soldiers higher pay, and then charge the government at an even higher

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rate, all for services provided by the human capital that the military itself originally helped build” (Singer 2005).

Broader issues of democratic accountability also arise. The use of the relatively invisible 20-30,000 private security personnel in Iraq reduced the perceived cost of the war in human lives. Contractor deaths were not counted among the 4000 soldiers killed in Iraq (as of the summer of 2008). With private firms providing personnel, the government can also engage in the application of force with less visibility and accountability than regular U.S. troops would entail. For instance, the Bush administration circumvented congressional limits on the number of troops the United States could deploy in Columbia’s civil war by using private security firms (Singer 2005, 126).

In 2006, the Bush administration hired private firms to perform the inherently governmental function of tax collection. In a practice reminiscent of the Roman practice of tax farming, the incentives for contractors amounted to up to 24 percent for attempting to collect approximately one billion dollars on delinquent taxes bills. The companies hired for the job collected \$49 million, a little more than half of what the IRS spent to implement the program (Layton and Lee 2008).

Historically, the Achilles heel of contracting out has been corruption. In the war in Iraq there have been plentiful examples of corruption that have led to the loss of billions of dollars.

### *IV. Managing the Executive Branch*

The management of the executive branch developed through the applications of the principles of classical public administration, with its emphasis on hierarchy and accountability. The beginnings of classical administrative theory coincided with the industrial revolution. As the government began to take a more active role in curbing the excesses of capitalism (such as child labor, monopolistic practices, and violent suppression of labor unions), administrative theories were developed to manage the growing executive branch effectively. Classical public administration theory peaked with the report of the Brownlow Committee in 1937 and in practice in the 1950s. After the 1960s, traditional public administration principles were undercut at the theoretical level by a range of management ideas falling under the general rubric of “the New Public Management.” At the practical level, the techniques of the NPM began to replace tenets of traditional public administration.

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This section will trace the development of the classical U.S. approach to public administration and then examine the business-oriented approaches to management that came to replace it in the latter half of the twentieth century.

### The Rise of Classical Public Administration

The traditional model of public administration in the United States rests in important ways on the principles Max Weber derived about the operations of bureaucracy (Pfiffner 2005). Even though Weber's writings were not translated into English until much later, the characteristics that he observed in European bureaucracies also applied to large-scale American governmental institutions. Weber emphasized control from top to bottom in the form of monocratic hierarchy, that is, a system of control in which policy is set at the top and carried out through a series of offices, with each manager and worker reporting to one superior and held to account by that person. The bureaucratic system is based on a set of rules and regulations flowing from public law; the system of control is rational and legal. The role of the bureaucrat is strictly subordinate to the political superior.

Max Weber described the role of the civil servant and the importance of hierarchical control in a bureaucratic system:

*To take a stand, to be passionate . . . is the politician's element and above all the element of the political leader. His conduct is subject to a different, indeed, exactly the opposite, principle of responsibility from that of the civil servant. The honor of the civil servant is vested in his ability to execute conscientiously the order of the superior authorities, exactly as if the order agreed with his own conviction. This holds even if the order appears wrong to him and if, despite the civil servant's remonstrances, the authority insists on the order. Without this moral discipline and self-denial, in the highest sense, the whole apparatus would fall to pieces. (Weber 1946, 95)*

While the system that Weber observed in Germany developed over several centuries, there was a parallel development of bureaucracy in other countries during the industrial revolution. This model of bureaucracy was crucial to the development of large-scale enterprises, private or public, throughout the developed world.

Woodrow Wilson, in an essay later to become one of the cornerstones of public administration theory, argued for the separation of administration from political policy making. According to

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Wilson, “. . . administration lies outside the proper sphere of *politics*. Administrative questions are not political questions. Although politics sets the tasks for administration, it should not be suffered to manipulate its offices” (Wilson 1887, 74). Wilson was the first and primary articulator of the politics-administration dichotomy.

Frederick Taylor made contributions to the classical model with his time and motion studies and careful analysis of the role of managers and workers. His techniques and managerial practices were adopted widely in the United States and throughout the world in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Taylor’s *Principles of Scientific Management*, published in 1911, was translated into German, and “Taylorism” was popular with German engineers before and after World War I (Taylor 1915; Kanigal 1997). Taylor’s principles of management emphasized tight control of work processes and careful planning by managers. Taylorism was used widely in the business world and was adopted in some areas of the federal government, despite the claim by some that it exploited workers by treating them as mere appendages of machines. Its conviction that there was one best way to accomplish any management job and the optimism that it

could be discovered by careful analysis widely influenced public administration

Although it is true that Taylor’s methods could be used to control workers to the point of domination, his original ideas did not necessarily imply the exploitation of workers. Taylor’s ideas were the animating force for the creation of the first centralized staff agency focused on management in the government. In 1916 the Division of Efficiency in the Civil Service Commission was transformed into the Bureau of Efficiency. It was independent of individual departments and agencies and existed until President Hoover abolished it in 1933 (Van Riper 1983; Lee 2006, 24-28; Kelly 2003).

Charles Dawes, the first director of the Bureau of the Budget and later Vice President, influenced public administration during the 1920s by emphasizing efficiency and control (Price 1951). Once Congress set a framework, Dawes believed that it was up to the president to use financial and personnel resources efficiently. Dawes was known for insisting on frugality, and he believed that BOB also had a mandate to give non-partisan advice to the President on managerial matters (Price 1951). In a pungent formulation of the poli-

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tics/administration dichotomy and separation of power, Dawes declared:

*Again, I say that we have nothing to do with policy. Much as we love the President, If Congress, in its omnipotence over appropriations and in accordance with its authority over policy, passed a laws that garbage should be put on the White House steps, it would be our regrettable duty, as a bureau, in an impartial, nonpolitical and non partisan way to advise the Executive and Congress as to how the largest amount of garbage could be spread in the most expeditious and economical manner. (Dawes 1923?, 178)*

The Brownlow Committee Report epitomized the collective Public Administration wisdom about “administrative management” when it was released in 1937 (Benda and Levine 1986; Kelly 2003; Kamensky 1996). Also, in the *Papers on the Science of Administration*, the foremost experts on public administration provided the background research for the Brownlow Committee’s recommendations. The compilation of articles was edited by Luther Gulick and Lionel Urwick. In the first chapter of the volume, “Notes on the Theory of Organization,” Gulick formulated the classic public administration statement of the functions of the executive as POSDCORB: planning, organizing, staff-

ing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting (Gulick et. al. 1937, Pearson, 1944)

Harold Smith, the director of the Bureau of the Budget from 1939 to 1946 established the management function of BOB in the Division of Administrative Management, and appointed Donald Stone to direct it (Benda and Levine 1986). In an article for PAR, Smith outlined eight principles for executive management of the budget, acknowledging that much work needed to be done to achieve these goals fully (Smith 1944). The White House staff was small at that time, and President Roosevelt depended on the Budget Bureau for staff support on administrative matters and coordination among different departments (Waldo and Pincus 1946). The management functions of BOB constituted an important part of its overall mission, in part because FDR had confidence in Harold Smith. After Smith left the bureau in 1946, the Administrative Management Division never achieved the status it had enjoyed, and in 1952 the management function was merged with other parts of the agency and the management staff was reduced (Benda and Levine 1986; Pfiffner 1991a).



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The traditional model of public administration spread throughout the industrialized world and ushered in the relative success of modern bureaucracies. Guy Peters summarized the principles of the traditional model of public administration as including the following characteristics: 1) An apolitical civil service; 2) Hierarchy and rules; 3) Permanence and stability; 4) An institutional civil service; 5) Internal regulation; and 6) Equality (internally and externally to the organization) (Peters 2001).

The politics/administration dichotomy that Wilson first articulated was one of the elements of the classical public administration orthodoxy. In the 1940s and 1950s the principle was criticized and dismissed by some as being naïve. However, those who dismissed the concept as obsolete understood it as an empirical assertion about how administration works in practice. They observed that in fact, many high level civil servants had an important impact on policy. The real importance of the politics-administration dichotomy, however, has to do with its normative implications (Hecko 1987). That is, the principle implied by the dichotomy is that elected officials and their direct appointees have the legal right to make policy decisions for the executive branch, and it is the duty

of career civil servants to carry out those policies in good faith. Thus it is the normative obligation of the dichotomy that is important, not its empirical content. The further implication is that partisan politics is appropriate at the policy making level, but the implementation of public policy should not be partisan politics.

### The Displacement of the Classical Model with the New Public Administration

Although the principles of the classical bureaucratic model remain important in the management of executive branch organizations, the consensus on the extent of its applicability in the government broke down. The latter decades of the twentieth century saw the replacement of some of its tenets with management principles and techniques developed in the private sector. Borrowing ideas from business management reached back to at least the era of scientific management, but private sector techniques returned to influence public management forcefully in the latter decades of the twentieth century. At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the collection of techniques known as the New Public Management came to influence heavily the management theory of Public Administration.

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Neither Presidents Kennedy nor Johnson concerned themselves with managerial matters, and Johnson was criticized for neglecting the management dimensions of many of the programs created in Johnson's "Great Society" innovations. One technique brought in from the private sector during the Johnson administration did come to dominate the budgetary process: Planning-Programming-Budgeting System (PPBS).<sup>5</sup> President Johnson became so enamored with the PPBS approach that he ordered it implemented throughout the executive branch in 1965. The intent of PPBS was to shift the budgetary focus away from inputs (personnel, objects purchased, etc.) to outcomes (achieving the goals of policies, such as literacy, a clean environment, efficient transportation, etc.). The problem was that this called for clearly defining goals of policies and the precise measurement of policy success. This analytic task proved to be virtually impossible, despite the progress that was made in the Defense Department (Kelly 2003; Pfiffner 1980; Wildavsky 1978).

When Richard Nixon came to office, PPBS was formally abandoned, and the administration brought people with MBA degrees to establish the private sector technique of Management by Objec-

tives (MBO). The intention of MBO was to evaluate performance according to measurable organizational objectives and to mandate that supervisors explicitly set goals with their subordinates (Drucker 1976; Kelly 2003). Implementation, however, was difficult and it came to be seen by some as an attempt by the administration to impose top-down direction and increased presidential control (Benda & Levine 1986). A major reason MBO failed to produce the management improvements its advocates promised was a lack of consensus on the objectives and an inability to quantify every important objective (Kelly 2003). MBO was effectively defunct by the end of the Nixon administration.

When Jimmy Carter was elected he brought with him the business technique of Zero Based Budgeting (ZBB) that he had used as governor of Georgia. The technique which was mandated throughout the federal government, was intended to help federal managers set spending priorities by building budget requests from the bottom up. Funding for each program was to be proposed in several "decision packages" that represented different levels of funding for programs. As the different packages were gathered at higher levels in the agency the different levels of funding could be compared and

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traded off by policy makers. Although ZBB was adopted throughout the government, it did not have a great impact on spending priorities, in part because Congress did not use it in appropriations decisions. In 1981 the Reagan Administration dropped ZBB.

Reagan considered government itself to be a major problem for the United States. He believed that the private sector was much more efficient and effective, and he encouraged contracting with the private sector to do the work of the government. The Cabinet Council on Management and Administration was formed in 1982 and the Reform '88 was inaugurated. Reagan's approach to management entailed bringing business approaches to executive branch agencies and in contracting out as much as possible to the private sector.

Organization Development was adapted from the private sector and became popular in the government in the late 1980s. It recommended reducing hierarchical barriers, greater honesty between superiors and subordinates, and the sharing of personal feelings among members of organizations. The Total Quality Management (TQM) movement also swept the private sector the 1980s and was mandated throughout the federal government

by executive order in 1988 (Wilson and Durant 1994; Walton 1986). The techniques were drawn from the ideas of Edward Deming who espoused careful statistical analysis and the attention to quality control at all stages of the production process. Rather than the radical restructuring favored by the reengineering movement, TQM advocated a bottom-up focus on improving organizational processes (Fesler and Kettl 1996).

The term new public management (NPM) encompasses a wide range of techniques and perspectives that are intended to overcome the inefficiencies inherent in the traditional model of public administration. Robert Behn defines the New Public Management as, ". . .the entire collection of tactics and strategies that seek to enhance the performance of the public sector. . . ." (Behn 2001, p.26). In Guy Peters's formulation, the new public management includes a range of reforms that have been tried over the past two decades by governments seeking to improve efficiency. The approaches of the NPM include more participation, flexibility, and internal deregulation and the use of market mechanisms externally (Peters 2001).

In the United States NPM was embodied in the Clinton Administration's National Performance

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Review (NPR) (Gore 1994; Kamensky 1996; Kelly 2003). The proponents of NPR contended that the progressive paradigm of government organization was designed during the industrial revolution and was modeled on large-scale bureaucracy with hierarchical control from the top to ensure responsiveness to law and adherence to policy. NPR suggested that new advances in information technology allowed flatter, more decentralized organizations to be feasible. It also outlined the new job of the federal executive as promoting teamwork, employee empowerment, customer satisfaction, accountability, and communication (Gore 1994). Ronald Moe, however, argued that the NPR undermined accountability in the federal government, emphasized customer satisfaction and neglected public purposes.

The Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) was similar in form to previous management reform efforts. GPRA principles were enacted into law in 1993 with bipartisan support, but the law was vague and general in its provisions (Radin 1998). It was designed to boost public confidence, and to focus on measured results, quality, satisfaction and objectives. Drawing on the ideas in MBO, PPBS, and ZBB, GPRA advocates argue that performance was measurable. GPRA was not

implemented uniformly across the agencies, therefore some were more successful with this than others (Radin 1998).

The George W. Bush administration undertook several management reform efforts: the President's Management Agenda (PMA), the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART), and various legislative proposals regarding management. The PMA contained five initiatives, mainly addressing human and financial resource management. It utilized OMB to assess implementation using a traffic light scorecard method of evaluation. The PART system was used to evaluate executive branch agencies based on assessing the purpose, planning, management, and results of programs in agencies (Breul 2007). Using PART scores to make judgments about management, David E. Lewis found that career civil servants performed better than political appointees (2007). Bush legislative proposals included a Freedom to Manage Act, which would have provided for faster Congressional consideration of management reforms, and a Managerial Flexibility Act, which would have increased managerial flexibility.

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### *Conclusion*

This essay has argued that the first half of the twentieth century saw the rise to dominance of classical public administration theory and its application to the executive branch of government. The growth of the merit system, presidential coordination, and orthodox approaches to management came together in the context of one coherent executive branch. The second half of the twentieth century has been marked by a reaction against what were seen as the rigidities of traditional public administration theory and practice.

The scholars and practitioners who wrote for *Public Administration Review* have, since 1940, documented and analyzed the rise and decline of American Public Administration theory. These changes in ideas about public administration were reflected in changes in the organization of the executive branch and its management. As is fitting for a journal reflecting the reality of public administration in the United States, these PAR authors have disagreed about the positive and negative dimensions of these developments. They have also disagreed about the proper role of the presidency in the federal government; the role of political appointees vis a vis the career services; the efficiency,

accountability, and effectiveness of contractors who perform government services; and about whether the management principles of classical public administration theory are still relevant in the information age.

The challenges for Public Administration scholarship going forward include evaluating the implications of executive branch developments during the past half century. Has White House domination of the executive branch led to better public policy implementation or hindered it? Should presidents once again try to integrate cabinet secretaries more fully into their policy making deliberations? Has the increasing number of political appointees reached the point of diminishing returns? Should the total number of political appointees be reduced, and should their placement be limited to the higher levels of administration policy making? Has the contracting of governmental functions to the private sector reduced the accountability of American government to the president, Congress, and the American people? Has the trend away from traditional public administration principles toward business management techniques improved the management of the executive branch, or should traditional principles of hierarchy and accountability be reinforced?

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The traditional approach to public administration will not go away any time soon, but its role in the management of the executive branch will continue to change and provide the focus for future scholars and practitioners who will find *Public Administration Review* the most authoritative outlet for their ideas about it.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> PAR was created in 1940 by the American Society for Public Administration as a journal utilizing the expertise of both academics and practitioners. “Beginning with PAR’s inaugural issue, which appeared 66 years ago under the able editorship of Leonard D. White and Don K. Price, and continuing through the most recent capable editorial direction by Larry D. Terry and Camilla Stivers [and now, the authors of this essay note, Richard Stillman], *PAR* has remained the premier American journal that bridges practice and research in public administration.” (Stillman and Raadschelders 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Some have considered the public administration principle of the politics/administration dichotomy as a naïve description of the actual operation of the federal government. If it were an empirical claim, it would be naïve, for the two are intertwined. But as a normative ideal, it prescribes the role of career civil servants as providing neutral (with respect to politics and party) advice to political superiors. It is the legitimate duty of the political representatives of the president to make policy choices (Hecl 1979, 1999).