Leonard D. White did not plant the seeds from which the field of public administration grew; but for four decades he tended that garden with unexcelled devotion. Carefully cultivating, pruning, and transplanting, he sought to understand and to make clear to others the plan of the whole and to articulate the details of the several parts. The vast majority of students of public administration today were shaped at least in part by their exposure to White. Many have seen no need to leave the paths that he laid out or improved. Others have found White’s landscape too restrictive. Yet all must, in one way or another, come to terms with it as a vital part of coming to terms with their field of study.

Introduction

This chapter is designed to assist and deepen that confrontation. No reference is made to White’s universally acknowledged qualities as administrator, teacher, and gentleman, or to his numerous specific contributions to the study and practice of public administration.¹ Our concern is with his attempts to give definition to the whole. It will be argued here that throughout his career White was concerned with a fundamental contradiction that lay and still lies at the heart of the study of public administration, and that in the work of his later years he provided his best advice on the approach to that study. The focus will be on White’s Introduction to the Study of Public Administration, the

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four editions of which appeared in 1926, 1939, 1948, and 1955, and particularly the introductory and more theoretical chapters.\footnote{2}

The first comprehensive text in public administration, the *Introduction* stood supreme even while an increasing number of texts appeared; it is still widely considered to be in a class by itself. To a degree unusual for a text, it was the focus and expressed the range and depth of its author’s scholarly interests.\footnote{3} Admittedly, the *Introduction* has been criticized, at least in private, to an extent not entirely attributable to the hazards of preeminence. The generation of students after the Second World War, when memory of the reasons for the founding of the discipline had faded, often thought that White’s conception of public administration avoided or obscured many of the important questions. In the third and fourth editions, it often seemed that problems had been cloaked in definition; vigorous criticism and prescription replaced by bland description; the driving force of reform transformed into a slow, methodical process of reorganization and re-reorganization; and the confident and restless pursuit of scientific principles of administration encrusted with qualification and reservation. In this as in other respects White faithfully represented his discipline. Dissatisfaction with White’s approach is dissatisfaction with the study of public administration itself, as it is still widely understood.

**White’s Basic Assumptions**

**Administration Is a Single Process.** In the preface to the first edition of the *Introduction* White wrote:

The book rests upon at least four assumptions. It assumes that administration is a single process, substantially uniform in its essential characteristics wherever observed, and therefore avoids the study of municipal administration, state administration, or federal administration as such. It assumes that the study of administration should start from the base of management rather than the foundation of law, and is therefore more absorbed in the affairs of the American Management Association than in the decisions of the courts. It assumes that administration is still primarily an art but

\footnote{2. Published by the Macmillan Company, New York.}

\footnote{3. While an elaborate discussion of this contention is unnecessary, an attempt has been made to provide sufficient references at appropriate points for the convenience of the reader who may wish to satisfy himself, as the writer has done, that the thesis presented here finds support in White’s other writings.}

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attaches importance to the significant tendency to transform it into a science. It assumes that administration has become, and will continue to be the heart of the problem of modern government.⁴

These assumptions are still perhaps the best concise statement of the foundations of the discipline of public administration, despite the extraordinary development that the discipline has enjoyed since the words were written in 1926.

The most striking characteristic of these assumptions is that they all refer to administration, although the book is an introduction to public administration. Thus the positive part of the first assumption—"that administration is a single process, substantially uniform in its essential characteristics wherever observed"—emphasizes the uniformity of administration; but the negative part warns against an unrealistic division, not of administration, but of public administration. White begins his first chapter with an emphatic statement of this point:

There is an essential unity in the process of administration, whether it be observed in city, state or federal governments, that precludes a "stratified" classification of the subject. To treat it in terms of municipal administration, state administration, or national administration, is to imply a distinction that in reality does not exist. The fundamental problems such as the development of personal initiative, the assurance of individual competence and integrity, responsibility, coordination, fiscal supervision, leadership, morale are in fact the same; and most of the subjects of administration defy the political boundaries of local and state government.⁵

This inevitably suggests the question whether the essential unity in the process of administration also precludes a "stratified" classification of public administration and private administration. Is that also a distinction "that in reality does not exist'? White seems to be led, in principle, to answer this question affirmatively; but the very title and subject matter of his book imply a negative answer. He seeks to leave the question open. Public administration, he says, is "the management of men and materials in the accomplishment of the purposes of the state"; its objective is "the most efficient utilization of the resources at the disposal of officials and employees."⁶ This

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⁴. First edition, pp. vii–viii; the preface is reprinted in all editions.
⁵. First edition, p. 1; compare the second edition, p. 7; the third edition, p. 3; the fourth edition, p. 1.
definition "relates the conduct of government business to the conduct of the affairs of any other social organization . . . in all of which good management is recognized as an element essential to success"; but it "leaves open the question to what extent the administration itself participates in formulating the purposes of the state, and avoids any controversy as to the precise nature of administrative action." White avoids this controversy partly by providing no definition of administration, despite his emphasis on its essential homogeneity.\(^7\)

In the second edition, public administration in its broadest sense is said to consist "of all those operations having for their purpose the fulfillment or enforcement of public policy as declared by the competent authorities."\(^8\) It is a special case of the larger category of administration, "a process which is common to all organized human effort" or (in the third and fourth editions) "a process common to all group effort, public or private, civil or military, large scale or small scale."\(^9\) "The art of administration is the direction, coordination, and control of many persons to achieve some purpose or objective." An administrator is one who exercises that art, and "there are administrators in all human activities except those capable of being executed by one person."\(^10\)

It is possible to construct a definition of administration from the elements that White provides, and the result may suggest the reason for this curious omission: administration consists of all those operations aiming at the achievement of some purpose or objective shared by two or more people. It excludes, then, only those "operations" that are nonpurposive and those that concern only one person.

**Administration Has Its Base in Management.** "Despite great differ-

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8. In later editions White does define "the art of administration" and "an administrator." He also quotes in passing a well-known definition of administration by Brooks Adams in the third edition, p. 4, and the fourth edition, p. 2, as well as a comment by Paul Appleby that might be called a definition in the third edition, p. 8.

9. Second edition, p. 3. In italics in the original. Consistently with his broader, more "political" understanding of public administration in recent years, White repeats this definition in the third and fourth editions but omits "as declared by competent authorities," presumably in recognition of the participation of public administration in deciding, as well as fulfilling or enforcing, public policy. Third edition, p. 3; fourth edition, p. 1.


11. Third edition, p. 4; fourth edition, p. 2; the definition of the art of administration is in italics in the original.
ences in culture and technology, the process of management throughout the centuries was inherently the same as that which now makes feasible great business enterprises, continental systems of government, and the beginnings of a world order.\textsuperscript{12} Yet only comparatively recently has the process of management as such been subjected to systematic study. In the case of public administration, the late start can be attributed to an excessive preoccupation with law.

White's second assumption is "that the study of administration should start from the base of management rather than the foundation of law, and is therefore more absorbed in the affairs of the American Management Association than in the decisions of the courts." This confirms what seemed to be an implication of the first assumption, that the unity in the process of administration precludes a distinction between public and private administration, as it precludes a distinction between federal, state, and municipal administration. However, this proposition is the end of one of the paths along which White proceeded; the beginning was a declaration of independence from law.

\textit{Goodnow and the relation to law}. White would have agreed with Frank Goodnow's statement written in 1905:

The most striking if not the most important questions of public law and the first to demand solution are those to which the name "constitutional" is applied. To their solution the wisdom and political activity of the past have been devoted. The present age, however, is devoting itself primarily to questions which are generally referred to as "administrative." A function of government called "administration" is being differentiated from the general sphere of governmental activity, and the term "administrative law" is applied to the rules of law which regulate its discharge.\textsuperscript{13}

White argues, however, that Goodnow's writings "do not make a clear distinction between administration and administrative law. This distinction is only now emerging in fact."\textsuperscript{14} He adopts Goodnow's definition of administrative law: "that part of the public law

\textsuperscript{12} Third edition, p. 3; fourth edition, p. 1.


\textsuperscript{14} First edition, note 2. White refers here to Goodnow's writings on administrative law and not to his \textit{Politics and Administration} (New York: Macmillan Co., 1900), which, although cited in the first edition, appears to have made little impression on White until later; compare the second edition, p. 12.
which fixes the organization and determines the competence of the administrative authorities, and indicates to the individual remedies for the violation of his rights. " This definition, White says, rightly emphasizes the major objective of administrative law, which is the protection of private rights. The objective of public administration, in contrast, is the efficient conduct of public business. "These two goals are not only different, but may at times conflict. Administration is of course bound by the rules of administrative law, as well as by the prescriptions of constitutional law; but within the boundaries thus set, it seeks the most effective accomplishment of public purposes. "

What Goodnow did not sufficiently recognize was that public administration and administrative law are related but distinct fields, governed by internal principles of their own. Thus White does not focus, as Goodnow does, on the rules of law regulating the discharge of the emerging function of "administration," but on the internal rules of the function. This helps to explain both the similarity and the differences between White's Introduction and Goodnow's The Principles of the Administrative Law of the United States. Viewed in a half-century perspective, the similarity is perhaps the more surprising. In every respect but one the main outlines of White's book follow those of Goodnow's, occasionally chapter by chapter and even section by section. The frequency with which White's discussion parallels Goodnow's is almost as striking as the fact that White exhibits a very considerable concern with the decisions of the courts and scarcely any concern with the affairs of the American Management Association.

Several explanations can be suggested for this similarity between the first comprehensive statement of the new field of public administration and the then major work in the field from which public administration issued. Goodnow, while a teacher and scholar in the field of administrative law, was at the same time deliberately laying the ground for the study of public administration and is one of its acknowledged founders. It is not startling that White patterned himself after Goodnow, even after having set out on his independent way. Although White's second edition contains a new section on fiscal management (which finds no parallel in Goodnow), and further changes occur in subsequent editions, the basic organization remains


16. One of Goodnow's major sections deals with "Local Administration" to which there is nothing comparable in White. Many of White's individual chapters are, however, arranged on the basis of the federal-state-municipal distinction.
the same. Goodnow and White were, after all, examining the same subject, if from different points of view. Thus, for example, while Goodnow treats "offices and officers," White deals with "the personnel problem"; for Goodnow the central problem is the law governing the official relation, for White it is morale.

This is more than a difference in point of view. For White, it was the difference between looking at the "boundaries" of a thing, and looking at the thing itself. However, in order to press deeper into White's conception of the study of public administration, it is important to see why this statement of the difference is problematical. The thing looked at, administration, is said to be a process. As process, it does not contain its own definition; it does not set its own boundaries or the end toward which it moves. Indeed, as process, administration seems to comprehend all human activity, except that which is entirely solitary. What, then, gives public administration its definition? It is law, as White admits. Law provides both the ends and the means of public administration.

White's definition of public administration does not deny its dependence on law, but "emphasizes the managerial phase of administration and minimizes its legalistic and formal aspect." This is not sufficiently precise, however, for White emphasizes the managerial phase of public administration. This adjective again introduces "the foundation of law" as starting point for the study of public administration—contrary to White's second assumption. White attempts to surmount this difficulty by arguing that, while the ends and boundaries of public administration are set by law, public administration is management and, as such, no different from any other kind of administration. In that case, why study public administration at all? Is such study a purely arbitrary selection of a part of the ubiquitous process of administration, or is it based on some fundamental distinction that cuts through "process as process"?

Wilson and subordination to law. The question of the basis of the study of public administration is most directly considered in the second edition, the only one to contain a chapter called "Scope and Nature of Public Administration," and the only one to make use of Woodrow Wilson's definition of public administration as "detailed and systematic execution of public law." "Law," White says, "provides the immediate framework within which public administration

operates," defining its tasks, establishing its major structure, providing it with funds, and setting forth rules or procedure. "Public administration is embedded in law, and the student of the subject will often be with the statutes." 19 Nevertheless, White contends that an almost exclusive concern with law has blinded American students and civil servants to the essential unity of the process of administration and the internal nonlegal principles governing it. One practical result is that American public administration displays "an exaggeration of legal correctness, and in consequence an accentuation of the lawyer in administration..." 20

By Wilson's definition of public administration, "every particular application of general law is an act of administration." To deal with administration in such terms, White says, "would require analysis of the military as well as the judicial and civil arms of the government, and would lead into each of the many activities supported by the modern state..." He proposes to deal with "only a part of the entire field..." and proceeds to set some limits. 21

White is not concerned with "operations peculiar to the special fields of administration," such as techniques of preventing soil erosion or identifying suspected criminals. These are highly particularized procedures, best left to specialists. "They are, however, the primary substantive functions of administration and from one point of view it is artificial to describe public administration apart from these major functions." It would be "feasible" to approach public

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21. Second edition, p. 4; the quotations in the following three paragraphs are taken from the second edition, pp. 5–7. It is unnecessary to deal with White's discussion of the exclusion of military administration. It appears, indeed, to be a misapprehension to think that Wilson's definition of public administration requires the inclusion of military administration, which does not have as its end the detailed and systematic execution of public law. The army is not characteristically a law enforcement agency but acts in an area and seeks to accomplish ends that the law cannot reach. Whatever the difficulty in excluding military administration, it arises from White's definition of public administration, not Wilson's.
administration "starting from the substantive activities toward which all official work is directed," but "for practical as well as technical reasons . . . it is necessary to stop short of describing all human problems and public policies in an effort to clear one path through the field of public administration." Clearing "one path" is possible and desirable, because, underlying the particular substantive functions, "there are certain common procedures and problems characteristic of modern administration under any political system and in any field of government activity. . . . These aspects of administration are broadly managerial in nature. They comprise the content of this volume."

These "managerial" procedures and problems are not, evidently, merely "aspects" of administration, for White goes on to say that his study "concentrates on the central core of the total complex of administration."22 He is concerned with "process as process," and he seeks to expose and to treat the "essential unity in the process of administration." It is unnecessary to restate the whole series of questions and counter-questions to which this argument gives rise; but it is notable that while White concludes that "the study of the content of public policy, on which all administration depends, is not necessary to the technical study of administrative procedures as such," he does not retract his earlier warning that a description of public administration apart from its substantive functions is somehow "artificial."

Judicial administration is also excluded from the Introduction, even though "the major purpose of the court is the same as that of the administration: to enforce and to implement public policy as declared in law."23 It is "due to the specialized nature of law enforcement by judicial decision [that] the judges as administrators will not be given systematic consideration in this volume." What is it about this particular specialization that supports the exclusion of judicial administration from a text in public administration? Wilson's definition seems to imply that what the courts do is public administration par excellence; thus, the study of public administration would seem to be centrally, although not exclusively, concerned with what is called the administration of justice. But one of White's major objectives was to replace the judge as the central figure in public administration with, say, the city manager.24 Wilson's definition, which leads

22. Italics supplied.
24. White's book on the city manager was published the year after the first edition of the Introduction and gave expression to White's conviction of the significance of this "emerging technical-professional official" in the development of a "new ideal of officialdom." The city manager, White
back to the radical subordination of public administration to law, is abandoned in White’s subsequent editions.25

Administration—An Art, in Transformation to a Science. The functioning of a modern administrative department “is a far cry from the Egyptian scribe who laboriously copied accounts on his roll of papyrus, but the natural history of administration connects its ancient and modern forms in an unbroken sequence of development. . . . What differentiates the modern public official from the scribe of antiquity is the marvelous material equipment with which he works, and the contribution which science has made, and continues to make, to his profession.”26 Thus, White’s third assumption is that, while administration is still an art, there is a “significant tendency to transform it into a science.” Besides furnishing the tools with which modern administration works, science “is transforming the methods of administration (in the sense of management) from rule of thumb empiricism to ascertained principle.” Scientific management, with its quest for the “one best way,” has been the leader in this movement. Sufficient progress has been made so that “we are wholly justified in asserting that a science of management appears to be immediately before us.”27

However, each succeeding edition of the Introduction contains fewer scientific “principles” of organization and management and more qualifications about those remaining. For example, discussing the allocation of responsibility and authority, White says in the first edition: “The principle to be observed here is simple enough; to define responsibility so precisely that each official will be specifically charged with definite duties, under such conditions that success or failure will depend upon his own diligence and wisdom, or the contrary.” A “necessary corollary” is that each official should be vested with “adequate authority, both legal and financial, to enable

thought, was “a forerunner of the type of official who must become the pattern of the next generation if the American government is to achieve its purpose, or even maintain its self-respect.” The City Manager (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927), p. 287. In later years the city manager was replaced as the central figure in White’s view of public administration by the Hamiltonian Chief Executive and the federal senior civil servant. But see below, n. 57.

25. It should be said that White nevertheless follows, to a very considerable degree, the lines set out in Wilson’s essay as a whole. Indeed, White’s difficulty here reflects a difficulty in Wilson’s essay itself.


27. Ibid., pp. 15–16; compare The City Manager, pp. 257–58.
him to discharge efficiently the duties pertaining to his office." White
concedes that "the application of these principles is full of difficulty,"
but the principles themselves are clear. 28 In the second edition he
adds "the rule of unity of command," to which he attaches "cardinal
importance," and which "emphasizes the desirability of a single
source of final authority in any organization, a reminder of the old
saw, 'No man can serve two masters.' " He repeats that "the location
of authority, given unity of command, must be in the clearest terms"
and that "power must be commensurate with responsibility." 29

In the third edition, these principles appear in a much more
qualified form. 30 In a new section called "The Search for Principles"
White says that "in the strictest sense of the term, principles in
administration are still largely to be formulated. In the meaning of
'principles' that suggests only working rules of conduct which wide
experience seems to have validated, a number can be stated." 31 He
then shows, following Herbert Simon, that the traditional principles
are often in conflict and invariably imprecise. White retains as "a
sound working rule" the notion that authority should be allocated in
clear and precise terms, especially at the bottom of the hierarchy; at
the top, such allocation is difficult and perhaps even damaging. That
authority must be commensurate with responsibility is now said to
contain "an essential kernel of truth"; but it is a maxim "rarely if ever
attained in practice, and ought perhaps to be reformulated in reverse:
responsibility does not exceed the most effective use of authority and
resources actually available."

Reevaluating scientific management. White never abandoned the
pursuit of principles of administration, 32 but he came to the view that
what had formerly seemed to be solid principles (however difficult
their application) were, rather, prudential rules of thumb, useful but
far from genuinely scientific. He came also to the view that the goal
was something less than the "transformation" of administration into
a science.

This was no radical revision of opinion. Moderate in everything,
White had always reserved his opinion as to how far the "transfor-
tion" might go. The very formulation of his third assumption indicates a reservation. So, also, for example, does the discussion, in the first edition, of methods to measure the efficiency of public administration. White warns that the measurement of so complex and elusive a subject will be the work of many years if, indeed, it can ever be achieved. "But practically we are constantly making judgments as to the success or failure of our institutions and their methods, and it is certainly in point to attempt to refine those judgments so far as possible. . . . From the scientific point of view, the search for tangible standards is of fundamental importance; and brief experience indicates that it has a practical value as well."

White did not in his early years unreservedly assert that administrative practice could be wholly comprehended under scientific administrative theory, as he did not in his later years altogether abandon the search for scientific principles. But there was a cooling of his confidence in the scientific way, as may be seen in the later editions of the Introduction and in the direction of his later research interests. Even as late as the third edition of the Introduction, White wrote that "scientific management in principle is applicable to government as well as to industry." But, in the last edition scientific management is assessed in different and more modest terms. White argues that the influence of the "underlying ideas of Taylorism" was not destroyed by "a more sophisticated skepticism" about the possibility of discovering "the one best way."

The very great influence of the scientific management movement in government has been due, not to its specialized procedures, but to the ideas that administration is subject to constant improvement, that some ways of organizing and operating are better than others, and that it is the duty of top management to find the best way for a given staff under given conditions of operation—all of which may change unpredictably.

33. First edition, p. 76. In the same place White speaks of a technique of rating city services devised by the Colorado League of Municipalities. The technique would now be regarded as extremely crude, and White saw the difficulties; but at the same time he did not wish to discourage this kind of attempt. His criticism is a delightful model of his characteristic circumspection: "Consideration of this plan will reveal a number of assumptions which require careful consideration before too great reliance can be placed on results. In general it may be said that it is easier to secure statistical material than to give it a sound interpretation in evaluating the efficiency of city government."

34. Third edition, p. 18.

There is little, according to this description, that is "scientific" in the contribution of scientific management. If White is correct, the main force of Taylorism appears to have been dissipated into the most general notions of continuous self-improvement.

In the last two editions, White chose to emphasize the problematic character of administrative science by calling the introductory chapter "The Art of Administration." In the last edition this chapter contains a section called "Administration—Science or Art" in which White much qualifies the earlier expectation of a "transformation" of administration from an art into a science.

Whether these promising attempts to reduce some part of the field of administration to propositions of general, if not universal, validity will transform the study and practice of administration is still an open question. The effort is eminently worth making. . . . Since administration is certainly in part an art, non-scientific writing will continue to hold an important place. It may, however, progressively become a science, or a science bounded by cultural differences. . . .

"A science bounded by cultural differences"—bounded by what White calls "the form and spirit of public administration in the United States." These words reflect a significant change in emphasis or, perhaps more exactly, in perspective.

Each edition of the Introduction contains a chapter dealing with "technical problems of large-scale organization and management" or "pure theory" of organization—the subject matter of the science of administration, as White generally understood it. In the last three editions this chapter deals systematically and more or less abstractly with such matters as the individual and his position, the formation of administrative units, hierarchy, authority, and coordination. It

36. The title in the first edition was "Administration and the Modern State" and in the second edition, "Scope and Nature of Public Administration."


38. Second edition, p. 38; third edition, p. 27; fourth edition, p. 27. This chapter introduces the section of the book dealing with "structure and organization." In the last edition White attempts to recast the whole discussion in terms of "Hamilton's doctrine of executive unity." Fourth edition, p. 44. Thus what began in the first edition as a discussion of "The Forms and Methods of Integration" became in the second and third editions a discussion of "The Chief Executive as General Manager" and in the fourth edition a discussion of "The Quest for Unity: The Chief Executive."

39. In the fourth edition, however, White proceeds "from the top of the hierarchy down through its principal levels" (p. 29) rather than, as in the former editions, from the bottom up.
presents "some of the characteristic elements of large and complex organizations, viewed for the moment merely as huge aggregations of people at work."40 By the last edition, this chapter is "bounded," literally, by "cultural differences." It opens with the distinctly political and constitutional question of the authority to determine organization.41 And, to the otherwise unchanged conclusion, White adds this sentence:

These generalities become more meaningful in the pages that follow, as they are translated in terms of the living experience of Presidents, Secretaries, staff advisers, and field agents, into what President John Tyler once described as "the complex, but at the same time beautiful, machinery of our system of government."42

Thus, generalities about organization become more meaningful as they are seen in terms of the living experience of American public administration. This statement stands in significant contrast to the main thrust of White's original intention, which was to give meaning to American public administration by seeing it in terms of generalizations about administration as a universal process.

Administration—the Central Problem of Modern Government. The fourth assumption is "that administration has become, and will continue to be the heart of the problem of modern government." White begins the first edition, as writings on American government had ordinarily begun, with a discussion of the constitutional separation of powers or functions, but he insists that the traditional assertion of the centrality of the legislative function misses the main characteristic of modern government.

In an earlier and simpler age, legislative bodies had the time to deal with the major issues, the character of which was suited to the deliberations of the lay mind; they were primarily problems involving judgments on important questions of political ethics, such as the enfranchisement of citizens by abolishing property qualifications, the disposition of the public land, the disestablishment of the Anglican Church, or the liberalization of a Monarchist state. The problems

41. This subject had also opened the comparable chapter in the first edition but had been dropped from the intervening ones, presumably on the ground that it was not appropriately dealt with in a chapter on the "pure theory" of organization.
42. Fourth edition, p. 43.
which crowd upon legislative bodies today are often entangled with, or become exclusively technical questions which the layman can handle only by utilizing the services of the expert. . . . These [experts] are not merely useful to legislators overwhelmed by the increasing flood of bills; they are simply indispensable. They are the government. One may indeed suggest that the traditional assignment of the legislature as the pivotal agency in the governmental triumvirate is destined at no distant date to be replaced by a more realistic analysis which will establish government as the task of administration, operating within such areas as may be circumscribed by legislatures and courts.\footnote{43}

Nor is this merely a matter of the administration doing what legislatures (and courts) formerly did.\footnote{44} The work of government has changed, so that the experts now "are the government." More is involved here than an enormous increase in the complexity and technicality of the problems of modern government; for however indispensable the technician or the expert might become, he would remain, as technician, subordinate to those dealing with the nontechnical, political problems. The point is that the political sphere, to which the technician is in principle subordinate, is no longer the place where the real problems arise. The great political questions are settled, and a form of government and distribution of powers appropriate when these questions were still unanswered is appropriate no longer.\footnote{45} This is the explanation of White's comment that, though the role of administration "in the logic of our governmental system is distinctly subordinate," yet "this should not conceal the fact . . . that the business of government in the twentieth century is

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\begin{itemize}
    \item \footnote{43. First edition, p. 6.}
    \item \footnote{44. But see below, "The Role of Administration in the United States."}
    \item \footnote{45. "Governmental problems have become intricate and ever more insistent. They call for solution with the aid of science, not with the wisdom of a ward politician." The City Manager, p. 295; compare Introduction, the first edition, p. 13, where White says that "science has revealed the objects to be achieved. . . ." In another study during this early period, White says of the old disputes over the dominance of power in the federal system that "the advent of a new society . . . took the issue boldly away from the constitutional lawyers and the orators, settled it in broad outline by the pressure of events and vested the modus vivendi largely in the hands of the administrators." Trends in Public Administration (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1933), p. 8; and see pp. 11, 235–56, 330–31; see in the same connection White's more recent essay "The Public Service of the Future" in The Future of Government in the United States.}
\end{itemize}
fundamentally the business of administration.”46 On this ground it is possible to understand the culmination of White’s four assumptions: that administration, itself essentially nonpolitical, is the heart of the problem of modern government.

The development of American administration. Especially in the first edition, White takes care to describe how administration came to occupy this central position in modern government. The source is a new social philosophy, growing out of “the industrial revolution and its many social, economic, and political implications. . . .”

The industrial revolution has necessitated . . . a degree of social cooperation in which laissez faire has become impossible; and gradually the new environment is building up in men’s minds a conception of the role of the state which approximates the function assigned it by the conditions of modern life. These new ideas involve the acceptance of the state as a great agency of social cooperation, as well as an agency of social regulation.47

Again there is the implication that the fundamental political questions are closed.

This analysis is carried forward, in the second edition, in a chapter entitled “Trends in the American Administrative System,” in which White traces the development of the American administrative system—and by implication other advanced systems—from that appropriate to a simple rural civilization demanding little from government to that required by an urban, industrialized civilization dependent on government at every turn. As industrialization developed, “the relative equality of life in early America began to fade. . . and the line of separation between those who had much and those who had little became clearer and clearer.” But political inequality had been largely extinguished; and the government, “responsive to the voting power of the masses,” began to protect those harmed by unregulated industrial competition and to prevent the steady concentration of wealth in a few hands. “Here is one of the basic social changes which supports much modern administration.”48

White did not press on with this broad inquiry, perhaps because the historical understanding from which it was derived came to seem doubtful, or, more likely, because by 1939 it seemed that what

46. First edition, p. 24. “The legislature, although of all organs of government the most representative, is forced by its own methods to stand at the greatest distance from the real business of governing.” Ibid., p. 399.
47. Ibid., p. 8; compare ibid., pp. 463–66.
distinguished American government and administration from other modern administrative states was more significant than what it had in common with them—to say nothing of nongovernmental administration.\textsuperscript{49}

\textit{The form and spirit of American administration.} As early as the second edition, White anticipates his later use of history less as a way of understanding the rise of administration and administrative science than as a way of understanding the political conditions and ends that give American public administration its special character. "As the result of well over a hundred years' uninterrupted development, an administrative structure has been evolved with characteristics peculiar to it. It is different from the Dutch, the Japanese, the Argentinean or the English civil service; it is peculiarly American."\textsuperscript{50}

The title of the comparable chapter in the third and fourth editions indicates a clarification of intention; the discussion now centers not upon "trends" but upon "The Form and Spirit of Public Administration in the United States" and consists of a more extensive and systematic statement of the foundations of the American system. Its significance lies in the effort to describe what distinguishes American public administration, not only from administration in general, but from systems of public administration elsewhere—to give the study of public administration that meaningfulness that comes from its connection with "the complex, but at the same time beautiful, machinery of our system of government."

The complex organization that carries on the common business of the American people bears today the unmistakable marks of its evolution: the initial Federalist conception emphasizing energy and responsibility, the Jacksonian insistence upon democracy in administration, the appeal for integrity and decency launched by the moral reformers after the Civil War, and the influence of technology and management in a later day.

The catastrophic forces of depression and war, the international tensions since 1945, and the mere magnitude of the

\textsuperscript{49} See the prefaces to the third and fourth editions. There are in the later editions expressions of the early view of the great march of history toward the modern administrative state where the problems are technical ones; but it is of some significance that more stress is laid on the political as distinguished from the economic and technological causes. See third edition, pp. 5–6; fourth edition, pp. 3–4. Moreover, this view lost its former importance in White's overall understanding.

\textsuperscript{50} Second edition, p. 32.
administrative machine, at home and overseas, tend toward the dominance of the ideas of Alexander Hamilton rather than those of Andrew Jackson. The first half of the present century may indeed be called the new Hamiltonianism. The democratic ideal, nevertheless, has not lost strength even though the rule of rotation is circumscribed; and the power of moral standards in the public service is magnified, not lessened, by occasional personal failures.\textsuperscript{51}

Originally, White's problem seemed to be to dispose of the political aspect of public administration, while acknowledging its importance, in order to get down to the real work of studying administration proper.\textsuperscript{52} This was thought to be consistent with the historical trend thrusting administration into preeminence. White never entirely abandoned this view, but increasingly a different one made a strong claim upon his understanding. This was the view that the "political" element of public administration cannot be disposed of by the student of public administration, because it affects "administration" at every turn and is, therefore, an intrinsic, even fundamental, part of the study of public administration.\textsuperscript{53}

White could still write in the fourth edition that "one day a philosopher-practitioner with a global experience may write a book that has as much meaning for Mexico as for Sweden, for the Indonesian Republic as for Israel."\textsuperscript{54} But it is difficult to imagine, on the basis of this last edition, what such a book would include and even


\textsuperscript{52} "It ought to be possible in this country to separate politics from administration. Sound administration can develop and continue only if this separation can be achieved. For a century they have been confused, with evil results beyond measure. The [city] managers have an unparalleled opportunity and a deep obligation to teach the American people by their precept and conduct that their job is to administer the affairs of the city with integrity and efficiency and loyalty to the council, without participating in or allowing their work to be affected by contending programs or partisans." \textit{The City Manager}, p. 301. See generally the important discussion here in chaps. 10, 11, 14. On politics and administration, compare \textit{Introduction}, second edition, pp. 12–13; fourth edition, pp. 6–8.

\textsuperscript{53} See for example White's shifting interests as indicated by the chapter headings in the section of the \textit{Introduction} dealing with public personnel administration. White's study of Whitley Councils in the \textit{British Civil Service} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933) represents an early exploration of the kind of "personnel" question with which White was always (but especially in later years) concerned. See below, n. 65.

\textsuperscript{54} Fourth edition, p. 11; compare the fourth edition, p. viii.
whether it would be a book about public administration; it is even more difficult to imagine White pursuing, or seriously urging the pursuit, of the common denominator among, not only these nations, but also, say, the Red Cross, General Motors, Dartmouth College, and the Egyptian scribe.

The Role of Administration in the United States

Inevitably, White's growing concern with the form and spirit of public administration in the United States, and his declining confidence in a science of administration, affected his view of the role of public administration and public administrators in the United States and other similar governments.

In the early years, he had argued that modern government is characterized by the replacement of the great old constitutional and political questions by what are essentially technical questions of administration or management—thus the paradox that the central problem of modern times is not a political problem. But in spite of all the emphasis on "management," there was always some reservation concerning the supposedly nonpolitical nature of administration. In the first edition, White writes that the work of the administrative branch of the government involves judicial and legislative functions, as well as the executive functions to which the theory of the separation of powers would seem to confine it. As he put it in the next edition, "the essence of modern government is an obstinate intermingling of functions theoretically separate."55 Much of the work formerly done by legislatures and courts is now performed by officials in that part of the government called "administration." In itself, this means only that certain legislative and judicial functions are performed by new agencies. Assuredly, this raises problems unsettled by the old separation of powers theory; but it does not necessarily follow that these new functions of the administration are any the less legislative or judicial, or that they should be performed according to any but the traditional legislative and judicial standards. Following this line of reasoning, it could be argued that administration is the heart of modern government in the sense that age-old political and constitutional problems now present themselves as problems of (or in) public administration.56

56. It is of some interest to note, bearing in mind White's second assumption, that this is the theme around which the discipline of administrative law turns, so far as it is concerned with more than legal technicalities.
More explicitly, this argument might be taken to imply that administration is the heart of modern government precisely to the extent that public administration in modern government is not mere administration, but the main field within which political and constitutional problems now move. This is, in fact, a secondary and subdued theme of White’s *Introduction*; and although it never entirely displaces the emphasis on administrative management, it receives more emphatic statement in the later editions.  

The initiation of public policy has escaped legislative halls and now rests principally with official agencies and with citizen groups. The latter necessarily represent special segments of opinion and interest. The former have the moral obligation to represent the interest of all, to seek the public good. Being somewhat less vulnerable to outside pressures, public servants may cultivate the general welfare with greater detachment, with a surer reliance on rational analysis, with a clearer appreciation of long-run consequences, than representative bodies. This is not to say that their opinions should supersede the preferences of elected, representative bodies; it is merely to indicate the special values that are involved in the role which administration has now achieved.

This point of view suggests that statesmen are needed in the higher ranks of administration rather than technicians.  

On the one hand, then, “administration is a process common to all group effort, public or private, civil or military, large scale or small scale.”  

On the other, “the role which administration has now achieved” in American government is not common to all groups or to all governments; and it seems to be in that uncommon role, not in the common process, that the heart of the problem of modern government is to be found. “The need, incessant and urgent, is for

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the administrative mind that can hold fast to the public interest and bind conflicting special interests to it by skillful contrivance, based on knowledge but exceeding mere *expertise.*” Exceeding, that is to say, mere administration or management. “In the highest reaches the administrative art touches the political, but it grows out of different soil.”

White did not undertake the further reconstruction of the *Introduction* that this wise remark might be thought to call for. He did not consider whether a soil consisting of mere managerial expertise could nurture the highest form of the administrative art, or whether his original view of the way to study public administration—to search for principles of the uniform process of administration—was compatible with his later view of the governing reason for studying it—the urgent and incessant need for administrative statesmanship.

**The True Foundations**

White was confronted with two different guides to his subject. One urged the need to penetrate beneath the superficial differences between administrative systems and political orders to an investigation of the universal process of administration. The other persistently maintained the overriding importance of the difference between public and private administration and between the political conditions and ends of one administrative system and those of another.

In the early editions, the tension between these two guides is evident in White’s struggle to define public administration and to set future lines of study. However often he fell back on the political guide to make the boundaries of his subject, he still thought that the subject itself was the uniform process of administration. However, the theoretical problem—whether a mere process is worth studying and can be studied apart from what directs it—persisted. The conviction that such a study is possible and worthwhile was never abandoned, but it became much less marked. By the third edition, the conflicting claims of the “political” and the “administrative” guides to the study of public administration had been muted. The introductory chapter, considerably compressed, and with the theoretical problem smoothed over as far as possible, was followed by a pair of chapters in which the form and spirit of public administration in the United States and the pure theory of organization were given separate treatment. These warring approaches were not reconciled; but, under

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60. Third edition, p. 8; compare the fourth edition, p. 521.

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White’s judicious superintendence, they were made to march together, quietly if not harmoniously, throughout the book.

The comment should be made, however, that the third and fourth editions represent less fully than the first two, White’s conception of public administration at the time he wrote them. In the third edition there is found a distinct indication that White had come to regard the Introduction as having been built on only a partial view of public administration.

The study of public administration has advanced to an extraordinary degree since 1920. As an intellectual discipline the field of public administration still lacks much, including an account of its historical development, a comprehensive statement in general terms of its underlying principles, an exact definition of its central concepts, a penetrating analysis of its foundations in psychology and sociology, and an interpretative account of its role in the structure of government and of life. Further, it needs to be related to the broad generalizations of political theory concerned with such matters as justice, liberty, obedience, and the role of the state in human affairs. 61

According to this statement, the discipline of public administration still lacked (among other important things) an account of its historical development and a comprehensive statement of its theoretical and political foundations. White’s last works deal with the history. Why did he not choose what seems to be the greater of these tasks? Part of the answer may be that, while White saw the need, he found himself unable to perceive the line of inquiry by which the true foundations might be exposed. He saw the merits, but also the limitations, of many different approaches. Characteristically, the suggestion for fundamental probing quoted above is replaced, in the fourth edition, by a list of useful approaches.

There are many ways to study the phenomena of public administration. The first systematic American approach was through law and was devoted to the legal organization of public authorities, their legal forms of action, and the limits of their powers. . . . Subsequently came systematic writing primarily concerned with the nature of administrative institutions viewed as agencies of management, an approach related to the scientific management movement and reflecting the criterion of efficiency. More recently attention has been given to historical and biographical materials that re-

veal the evolution of administrative systems and trends in thinking about administration. The nature of administration has also been explored by sociologists, as one among many significant social structures. Most recently the sociological-psychological school of behaviorists has made important contributions to the understanding of why officials and public employees act as they do. All of these approaches are relevant and from all of them come wisdom and understanding.62

Missing here is an expression of White’s earlier concern for a comprehensive theoretical examination, or reexamination, of the study of public administration.63 Indeed, White seems to express that complacent, undiscriminating eclecticism which is all too common in this field—the view that public administration consists, somehow, of an aggregate of an almost infinite number of “perspectives,” institutional, political, sociological, psychological, technical, historical. Yet this judgment is insufficient when the work that occupied White’s last years is taken into account.

It is interesting to consider the order in which White presents these ways of studying public administration. It appears at first glance to be a simple progression—and so perhaps the behaviorists would argue; but there is reason to believe that White did not so regard it. Although he had a genuine respect for the contributions of sociology and the social-psychological school of behaviorists, and had made some early contributions himself along these lines,64 he was not altogether comfortable with the ways in which they led. He observed a brash young science drive assumptions and principles, which he had been one of the first to state systematically, to extremes that were foreign and distasteful to him. He saw this science carry the pursuit of an underlying process to the point where it seemed to abandon a concern with public administration altogether—a direction in which he had also been pressed but which he had resisted, in practice if not always in principle. As the rest of the discipline became more scientific and more concerned with process as process, White

63. But see fourth edition, p. viii.
64. The Prestige Value of Public Employment in Chicago: An Experimental Study (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929); Further Contributions to the Prestige Value of Public Employment (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932). These were preceded by Conditions of Municipal Employment in Chicago (City of Chicago, 1925), which yields insight into the methodological assumptions of White’s very early work and provides valuable information about Chicago city government in the 1920s.
became less so. As the most vigorous movements within the discipline shunted the political environment and ends of public administration more and more to the periphery, White brought them back to a prominent place.

It is misleading to regard White as having sought haven in the quiet eddy of history, while the rest of the discipline rushed by. Following what was in his case always a strong and sound instinct, he put aside as far as possible inherited theoretical apparatus and simply looked at public administration in the United States. He looked, it is true, at the public administration of yesterday, not today. The skill with which he described and the wisdom with which he interpreted what he saw have been almost universally acclaimed; and it is both likely and appropriate that his historical studies will be the most enduring products of a long and fruitful career. But the full significance of these books is missed if they are taken merely as history.

A thorough investigation of the importance of White’s histories for the study of public administration would require another lengthy essay, but the essential point has been anticipated, and can be stated briefly. White entitled the histories: The Federalists, The Jeffersonians, The Jacksonians, and The Republican Era. What was most important about public administration in the early years of the United States was not what it shared with all administration everywhere, but its character as Federalist administration. Federalist administrative theory and practice—best expressed in Hamilton’s views of executive energy, Washington’s conception of competence, and the notion of administration by gentlemen—were intrinsically connected with and subordinate to Federalist political and constitutional theory; and that, in the main, is the way White treats them.

White did not choose arbitrarily, as one perspective among many, the middle way of historical study for his mature years. It was

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65. Published in New York by the Macmillan Company in 1948, 1951, 1954, and 1958, respectively. White’s reconsideration of federalism in The States and the Nation (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1953) is consistent with the interpretation here and should be compared with the earlier discussions in the first edition of the Introduction (chap. 4 and pp. 469–70) and in Trends in Public Administration (part 1, esp. chap. 11). It is significant that during his last decade White chose as the subjects of his articles in the field of public administration: “Strikes in the Public Service” (Public Personnel Review, January 1949); “The Loyalty Program of the United States Government” (Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, December 1951); and “The Senior Civil Service” (Public Administration Review, Autumn 1955; Personnel Administration, January–February 1956).
his way of looking at the field of public administration afresh, of seeking not merely one perspective, but the true perspective within which other partial perspectives find their focus. White's histories may be taken as an object lesson in the study of public administration: which aspects are primary and which secondary; which perspectives are narrow and which broad; which ways lead to the heart and which to some nonessential limb.

This vital lesson in the discipline's standards of relevance and significance was taught, as White taught best, by example rather than by systematic theoretical exposition. Some of the original assumption—and the difficulties to which they give rise—are still present in the histories. Theoretical precision is not to be expected. Although concerned with the theoretical problems of his discipline for most of his life, White's was not fundamentally a theoretical mind. His true compass was his uncommonly good common sense, which enabled him to make substantial contributions to the study of public administration, even while leaving unresolved some of its most basic questions.

This quality also led him to choose administrative history as his way of beginning to relate the study to what he called, in the third edition of the Introduction, "the broad generalizations of political theory concerned with such matters as justice, liberty, obedience, and the role of the state in human affairs." White would have been the first to insist that his histories do not constitute a comprehensive "interpretative account" of the role of American public administration "in the structure of government and of life." But it is precisely White's breadth of concern—his concern with the relation between public administration and matters such as justice, liberty, obedience, and the role of the state in human affairs—that gives these books their special excellence and a great part of their value to present-day students of public administration.

66. Thus providing some ground for Dwight Waldo's criticism that "the dominant perspective in these volumes plainly is the POSDCORB perspective." Perspectives on Administration (University, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1956), p. 59. That the POSDCORB, or pure theory of organization, "perspective" is present is, indeed, plain, for example in White's numerous remarks on the state of the "administrative art" at different times. Whether, contrary to the argument here, this perspective is dominant, whether it provides the overall orientation, the standards of relevance and importance, the reader will have to judge for himself by reading the histories and reflecting on the relations between their parts and their whole.