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Brownlow Report Retrospective

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This year marked the 70th anniversary of the publication of the final report of the President's Committee on Administrative Management, commonly known as the Brownlow Report, after its chair Louis Brownlow. The purpose of this symposium is both to honor the historic significance of this moment for public administration history and, equally important, to provide the field with an opportunity to reflect on this landmark study and how its conclusions and recommendations continue to shape the intellectual and practical development of the American administrative state and our nation's democratic institutions.

In January 1937, President Franklin D. Roosevelt formally submitted the Brownlow Committee's findings to Congress in a 53-page report officially titled *Administrative Management in the Government of the United States.* Richard Polenberg, a leading authority on the reorganization of Roosevelt's government, accurately defends the president's commitment to the committee's final evaluation as follows:

> Roosevelt, whose knowledge of the structure of the federal establishment was extraordinary, had thoroughly mastered his Committee's recommendations … He presented the plan as one consistent with the best American traditions of efficiency and accomplishment…. The President repeatedly stressed one major theme: reorganization was consonant with the American tradition of good management. (1966, 28–29)

In Arthur Schlesinger's analysis of Roosevelt as a chief administrator, he underscores an observation similar to Polenberg's: "Nothing is more important for a President than to command the necessary abundance of understanding, loyalty, and ardor on the part of able and imaginative subordinates" (1978, 265). These observations point to the intellectual and pragmatic depths of Roosevelt's understanding of what the committee represented in terms of improving administrative management in the executive branch of the U.S. federal government.

Public administration scholars, political scientists, and reflective practitioners are well versed in the overall analyses of the committee's final report (Denhardt 1995; Fesler 1987; Karl 1963; Polenberg 1966; Rohr 1986; Rosenbloom and Kravchuk 2002; Stillman 1998). The study had dramatic impacts on the American presidency and the organizational and developmental structure of the executive branch, which is why many scholars often refer to it as the "high noon" of public administrative orthodoxy in the United States. At no other time in our nation's history has a report by public administrative scholars and practitioners so fundamentally transformed the federal government's workings. Richard Stillman (1998) contends that the report did more to structure the American presidency than anything since the political, administrative, and institutional precedents set in George Washington's administration. It laid the foundation for the establishment of the Executive Office of the President in 1939, "which fundamentally transformed the presidency from a weak office with a few staff assistants to what we know it as today, that is, one of the most powerful chief executive positions in the world" (Stillman 1998, 139; see also Fesler 1987).

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Louis Brownlow, Charles Merriam, and Luther Gulick, the committee's principal authors, along with Joseph P. Harris, who served as director of research for the study, were keenly aware of the transformational proposals they were recommending to Roosevelt, but

they were not alone in this highly theoretical, practical, and especially constitutional research endeavor. The final report that Roosevelt submitted to Congress was actually part of a much larger work titled *Administrative Management in the Government of the United States: Report of the President's Committee on Administrative Management* (1937). This title is significant because it underscores broader objectives for what the committee was investigating than what the report's title assumes.[1] This, as a result, has often led to misrepresentations of what the Brownlow Committee's recommendations for improved administrative management in the executive branch stood for, in both theory and practice (Newbold and Terry 2006).

As James Fesler, who coauthored one of the studies, correctly points out in his seminal evaluation of the committee's findings on its 50th anniversary, "The Committee's concern was administrative management. . . . what was to be put in the Executive Office were central agencies 'for the great *managerial* functions of the Government which affect all the administrative departments,' namely personnel management, fiscal and organizational management, and planning management" (1987, 294). Quite interestingly, Herbert Kaufman also illustrates this very point in his analysis of the study on "Problems of Administrative Management" for this symposium. To the observant scholar, each of the five studies accompanying the final report addressed these managerial functions in detail, and many of the recommendations that Brownlow and his colleagues incorporated into the report came from their analyses.

The theoretical and practical justifications for the recommendations made by Brownlow, Merriam, and Gulick can be found in five accompanying studies—an additional 323 pages of text—that Roosevelt commissioned and were official government documents published by the U.S. Government Printing Office. Prior to Newbold and Terry's (2006) analysis of these five studies, they had largely disappeared from the field's literature and consciousness. Newbold and Terry conclude that, as a whole, the studies reflect many of the core ideas that Alexander Hamilton had put forth in *Federalist No. 70* regarding the unity of the executive, which was a central component of energy in the executive (2006, 525–26).

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The five studies, written by outstanding experts in public administration, political science, and economics are as follows:

1. *Personnel Administration in the Federal Service,* by Floyd W. Reeves and Paul T. David
2. *Fiscal Management in the National Government,* by Arthur Buck and Harvey Mansfield
3. *The Problem of Independent Regulatory Commissions,* by Robert Cushman
4. *Problems of Administrative Management,* by Arthur Macmahon, James Fesler, and Herbert Emmerick
5. *The Exercise of Rule-Making Power and the Preparation of Proposed Legislative Measures by Administrative Departments,* by James Hart and Edwin Witte.[2]

Taken together, these studies serve two important purposes. First, they comprehend a great deal of the contemporary dynamics affecting the modern-day administrative state, including human resources management, fiscal responsibility and the organization of the nation's finances. independent regulatory activity, public sector management, and the folding of legislative functions, specifically rulemaking and bill writing, into the practice of public administration within the confines of the *executive* branch. Second, and perhaps more important, they illustrate, in the most articulate of terms, the significance of constitutional tradition to the maintenance and preservation of the American state. Polenberg's analysis supports Newbold and Terry's assertion regarding Brownlow, Merriam, Gulick and the accompanying contributors' argument that the constitutional principle of executive unity was considered essential to the maintenance and preservation of American democracy:

> They wished to strengthen the Chief Executive and weaken the power of Congressional committees and interest groups to block proposals for federal reorganization. Their conception of the Presidency was thoroughly Hamiltonian. "Energy in the executive is a leading character in the definition of good government," Hamilton had written in *The Federalist.* The report of the President's Committee on Administrative Management was an elaboration of this theme. (1966, 191–92)

Improving the practice of administrative management within the executive branch was the essential purpose of Roosevelt's committee; nevertheless, the authors continually reiterated that such efforts were unattainable without a clear and decisive understanding for how good administration preserved both the nation's constitutional

tradition and its democratic institutions. On the 70th anniversary of this landmark study, the field should be particularly cognizant of the relationship of the committee's final report and accompanying studies to the contemporary separation of powers and the dynamics of federal administration.

Purpose of the Symposium

The rationale for this symposium is multidimensional and has four distinctive purposes. First, it provides an opportunity to bring these long-forgotten studies back into intellectual history and consciousness of the field. Second, it assesses the impact that each study's recommendations had on administrative practice and the preservation of the nation's democratic institutions. Third, it evaluates the consonance of their main ideas with the development of American public administration as a field of intellectual study, including whether these ideas presaged the paradigm shift that occurred in the mid- and late 1940s. Finally, it allows us to reflect, individually and collectively, on their fundamental assumptions and how these assumptions might be viewed today, particularly with regard to constitutional tradition including, but not limited to, the separation of powers, transparency and accountability, individual civil rights and liberties, and the characterization of public administration as distinctively public or sharing generic qualities with private organizations.

Outline of the Symposium

Camilla Stivers and Ralph Hummel begin our reflection on the major issues and concerns of the 1937 committee in their evaluation of *Personnel Administration in the Federal Service.* They examine the extent to which Reeves and David's recommendations provide a coherent set of political and constitutional expectations for evaluating contemporary personnel policy. They, like Reeves and David, point to the importance of personnel theory in maintaining the legitimacy of American public administration and its democratic institutions. Stivers and Hummel are particularly cognizant of the need for a separation-of-powers regime to concern itself with equal opportunity, merit, and classification, all of which were topics that were important to the committee as a whole.

Second, Paul Posner analyzes *Fiscal Management in the National Government,* the committee's second study, and provides a detailed examination of Buck and Mansfield's professional opinion that the president should be at the center of fiscal management reform efforts. He emphasizes the historical legacy that their conclusions had on the intellectual development of public administration. He also points out the broader lessons the field can learn not only from this study, but also from the Brownlow Report as well, regarding ways to reform specific areas of public sector management in the future.

Third, Peri Arnold provides an intriguing commentary on *The Problem of Independent Regulatory Commissions,* which was of central concern to the committee's principal authors and especially to Roosevelt. Cushman's critique of regulatory commissions, as a result, was a dominant theme throughout the final report. Arnold weaves together a thoughtful and well-documented account of why Cushman and his colleagues feared these types of commissions, politically, administratively, institutionally, and constitutionally. He emphasizes how the conceptual framework of the changing political order in American political development has now enabled the president to become significantly more active in regulatory policy, and in ways that far exceeded the expectations of the committee's understanding of how to improve administrative management in the executive branch.

Arnold's concluding analysis is one of the prominent themes of Herbert Kaufman's fascinating and insightful perspective on *Problems of Administrative Management.* These problems included departmental management, executive management in the field service, and new ways to manage government corporations and independent supervisory agencies. Kaufman, who was one of Macmahon's doctoral students at Columbia University, is quick to remind us that these recommendations are from a different era. Roosevelt's government looked quite different from what we operate with today; therefore, the application of these recommendations for modern-day administrative management can be difficult to ascertain theoretically and practically. Kaufman, while making his case, astutely draws our attention to the reality that major reform documents, like the President's Committee on Administrative Management, tend to take on lives of their own once they are published, analyzed, and critiqued. After this occurs, the legacy of the reform itself may or may not be representative of the authors' original intent. Kaufman nevertheless eloquently speaks to the historical importance of this study. The committee's conclusions for reforming administrative management should remain part of the field's contemporary consciousness, he maintains, precisely because this was an extraordinary reform effort based overwhelmingly on the intellectual substance of American public administration. Irrespective of our opinions regarding the overall quality, purpose, impact, or evaluation of the Brownlow project, Kaufman draws attention to the fact that this committee sought to overcome the same types of difficulties contemporary scholars and practitioners face in their efforts to address complex problems of administrative management while simultaneously working to preserve the nation's democratic and constitutional heritage.

Finally, Stephanie Newbold and David Rosenbloom examine *The Exercise of Rule-Making Power and the Preparation of Proposed Legislative Measures by Administrative*

Departments. They critically evaluate the authors' assumption that the president should have substantial supervisory powers, both in the rulemaking process and in how agencies prepare bill writing. This, according to Hart and Witte, was essential for securing Hamilton's notion of executive unity, as expressed in *Federalist No. 70.* Because both of these functions, however, are *legislative* and not executive, Newbold and Rosenbloom carefully scrutinize the constitutional implications of these recommendations for a separation-of-powers regime.

Conclusion

We hope this brief introduction will inspire the public administration community—scholars and practitioners alike—to examine these excellent commentaries on the five accompanying studies that represent the complete Brownlow Report. We can no longer understand, conceptualize, and teach our students the historical, political, institutional, and constitutional significance of the President's Committee on Administrative Management without highlighting how these five studies influenced the final report that President Roosevelt submitted to Congress in January 1937. Kaufman wisely observed more than half a century ago, "Few clearer statements of the executive leadership value than the *Report of the President's Committee on Administrative Management* have ever been published" (1956, 1065), and the same remains true on the 70th anniversary of this landmark study.

Notes

1. When the U.S. Government Printing Office issued the report, it was titled *Administrative Management in the Government of the United States.* When the office issued the final report with the five accompanying studies, it titled the document *Administrative Management in the Government of the United States: Report of the President's Committee on Administrative Management.*
2. For a more detailed biographical outline of the authors' intellectual contributions to their respective fields and to the advancement of American government in general, see Newbold and Terry (2006).

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