

Role of Women in Public Administration  
(Years 1900-2000)  
Literature Review  
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### **Abstract**

The role of women in public administration has been ever evolving. Women have been struggling for equality in all avenues such as politics, academia, employment (government or private), research, publishing, etc. It is evident through a review of American history that women have always struggled to make their place in the government, however public administration is one field where their struggle has been much more difficult than in any other field. Women have come a long way from the 1900s to the 2000s, where women are now starting to equate men in certain disciplines of public administration (State and local government). But it is through a thorough analysis of the history of public administration that we are able to appreciate their accomplishments and understand the hurdles and hardships that they had to endure. Understanding their history is how truly we can appreciate their endeavors in the field. In this literature review of the role of women in public administration, we will be looking at women who have made major contributions to the field, the role of women in ASPA, role of women in public administration research and publications and finally what the future holds for the women in the field of public administration.

Keywords: women, public administration, equality, government, public, policy

## **Introduction**

The role of women in public administration has been ever evolving. Women have been struggling for equality in all avenues such as politics, academia, employment (government or private), research, publishing, etc. Women didn't gain the right to vote (passing of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment) until 1920 in the United States. Approximately 44 years later, the next breakthrough occurred with the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. However, it wasn't until 1970, and the passing of the Equal Rights Amendment, that women finally had a legal foundation to claim their equality by law. The Constitution of the United States was signed in 1787, and it only took us about 150 years or more to realize that women should be treated equal to men in all avenues of life.

It is evident through a review of American history that women have always struggled to make their place in the government, however public administration is one field where their struggle has been much more difficult than in any other field. Starting from the Founding Fathers writing the constitution, gender equality was not their primary concern. Gender equality didn't become a concern for anyone in the field until the mid-1900s, until women started speaking up for their rights and demanded to be taken seriously.

Public Administration has always been a male oriented field, even though prominent women have tried to make significant contributions scientifically, theoretically, and artistically, their contributions have been ignored until after the 1970s. Women such as Jane Adams, Josephine Goldmark, and Mary Parker Follet, were just some among others that should have been considered pioneers in the field, but weren't due to their gender. Their theories in the field of public administration were beyond their time but unfortunately, we didn't take advantage of

their expertise. It wasn't until the late 1970s that their work gained recognition and they became known for their philosophies on the field.

The American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) was formed in 1939. It wasn't until 1970, when the first task force was formed by the ASPA to look into the bias treatment of women in public administration. The next 3 years the task force dealt with the daunting task of figuring out how to ensure when receive equality in all aspects of public administration, whether it is the public sector, academia, or research. It was to ensure that women didn't get discouraged and stopped participating in public administration because of being neglected and thinking their voices were not being heard. The task force gave rise to the Committee on Women in Public Administration, which was established in 1973. The sole purpose of this committee was "to promote equal employment and educational opportunities for women in the public service, with particular emphasis on developing programs for women in ASPA" (Bishop, 1976, pp. 353). In reviewing the history of ASPA, it is imperative that we view the roles of Nesta Gallas, the first female president of the organization and Laverne Burchfield, the first female managing editor of the journal *Public Administration Review*. Despite the fact that Laverne Burchfield, in a way acquired the position due to a shortage in men (World War II), but none the less she was a force to reckon with in her capacity as managing editor of the journal.

Another area of public administration, where women have been underrepresented has been in research and publications. It isn't a mystery why this is the case. If women throughout the history of the field have not been taken seriously for their thoughts and ideologies, it is understandable how this would affect their publication rate. However, recent researchers, have tried to give a different view as to why there are lower publication rates for women in public

administration then men. Some of the proposed theories are that women are publishing in other journals or using other mediums to publish, women tend to conduct less collaborative work (we will explore whether this is intentional or forced, later on in the review), and due to less women holding supervisory positions, lower level research staff doesn't get same opportunities to publish as much as their senior staff of the opposite sex.

Throughout history women have overcome major obstacles, same holding true for their role in public administration. Despite the initial lack of recognition by their male colleagues, women have managed to create a name for themselves in this field. They have been relentless and refused to disappear in the background. Women have come a long way from the 1900s to the 2000s, where women are now starting to equate men in certain disciplines of public administration (State and local government). But it is through a thorough analysis of the history of public administration that we are able to appreciate their accomplishments and understand the hurdles and hardships that they had to endure. Understanding their history is how truly we can appreciate their endeavors in the field. In this literature review of the role of women in public administration, we will be looking at women who have made major contributions to the field, the role of women in ASPA, role of women in public administration research and publications and finally what the future holds for the women in the field of public administration.

### **Women who made major contributions in the field of Public Administration:**

#### **Jane Addams (September 6, 1860-May 21, 1935)**

Born and raised in Illinois, Addams was a philosopher, social worker and strong advocate of women's rights. Her work on municipal reform in public administration was a major contribution to the field. Though from the high class herself, she sympathized and understood

the problems of the common man (lower class). She was critical of the ideologies of the Founding Fathers, she believed that the laws written by them were not helpful to the common man, but were a hindrance to society. She felt that the Founding Fathers were not best suited to write policies or laws for the common man, since they didn't live or work alongside the common man and therefore didn't understand what their problems were. Addams views were of the epistemological nature this is evident through her work in the Hull House.

In 1889, she opened the Hull House in Chicago, which at that time was first of its kind. She lived and worked there alongside with individuals of both genders. She felt that was the best way to learn what the hardships of the common man were. The Hull house was a women centered place (even though men resided there too), where everyday issues like garbage collection, employment, issues affecting women (midwifery, prostitution), issues affecting children, to diseases plaguing the society at the time (typhoid, polio, etc.) were studied and researched. It was through the research and empirical data collected at the Hull House, that Addams was able to assist in advocating women's and children's rights and aid in the progressive municipal reform movements. She was also able to assist and promote child labor and women labor laws through her experience and research.

Addams, delivered her famous address on "Problems of Municipal Administration" in 1904, at the International Congress of Arts and Science at the Department of Politics. At the time of her address the progressive municipal reform movement era was at its peak. Due to the industrial revolution, the common man was left with poor living conditions, very little pay and no benefits. Corruption at the local and state level was at an all-time high. People wanted change and they wanted to see it happen fast. At that time, individuals like Addams, were there

for the people and believed that since they were living side by side with the common man they understood their problems much better than politicians or law makers and could help them.

Her address was an open criticism on the government and politicians of that time. She believed that the government should have one purpose and that is to promote the welfare of the common man. Addams, ended her address with the statement that “If we could trust democratic government as over against and distinct from the older types, from those which repress, rather than release, the power of the people, then we should begin to know what democracy really is, and our municipal administration would at last be free to attain Aristotle’s ideal of a city, where men live a common life for a noble end” (Addams, 1904, pp.36). This last statement summarizes her view on politics and the government of her era.

It is also evident through Addams views that she did not advocate the politics-administration dichotomy. Since her core belief was to do everything and anything to assist the common man. She believed that when we separate politics and administration we lose focus of the main problem, which is to help the common man. In my opinion, Addams’s views and ideologies were beyond her time. For someone with a limited educational background her theories were highly intellectual and refined. Some people claim Addams’s views to be too cynical, but given her experiences and the time period she was from, she was right on point with her ideology. To me she was a pioneer in the field of public administration and accomplished things and took actions rather than just speak or write about them.

### **Josephine Clara Goldmark (October 13, 1877-December 15, 1950)**

Goldmark, youngest of ten children, and born into a wealthy family in New York was known for her work on women and children labor laws and not so much for her work on

scientific management. She studied and taught alongside her sisters at Barnard College. She was strongly influenced by her family in her career choices, where her brother-in-law Louis Brandeis (first Jewish Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court) was a source of great inspiration.

The main focus of her work remained on the long work hours imposed on workers, specifically women in the work place. Through her work she tried to show how working long hours affects women worse than men, due to the fact that they have to bear children, do double work (manage a home and a work outside the home) and take care of her children. These long hours caused women to have major health problems and caused higher disease and accident rates, which not only impacts women but the whole society. Her theories were not based on scientific experiments or collection of experimental data, but were based on her opinion and opinions of the women in the work place, which was more of a social science approach of empiricism.

After years of work on labor laws, in 1912, she published her book titled “Fatigue and Efficiency.” In her book she wrote about all of the cases and experiences she has encountered showing how fatigue effects efficiency. She argued that in order for a worker to be more efficient, shorter work days were needed with breaks to regain your energy. This notion seems so normal to us today, but for the time that it was being written it was ground breaking. During this time the construction of the railroad system was ongoing in the United States, and employers believed that having workers work long hours would result in better results than shorter work days.



She moved into the realm of positivism with her work on the science of management. Her work coincided with that of Frederick Taylor's scientific management. They both agreed on the same notions of employee efficiency increasing with breaks in the work day, along with shorter working hours (simply stating that a well-rested employee is a more productive employee). Even though Goldmark, was well known around lawyers, legislators, or even social workers, she was not well known in the field of public administration. Even though her ideas and work coincided with those of the Father of scientific management (Taylor), we rarely read or hear about Goldmark's work on the theory. Once again we see the same pattern of an idea simply being dismissed or ignored due to gender inequality in the field.

Goldmark's work was instrumental for the time period she was in. During the time period of the industrial revolution and the progressive movement, her ideas were for the benefit of the society at large. If public administration didn't have biased opinions based on gender, they could have really benefited from her theories.

### **Mary Parker Follet (September 3, 1868-December 18, 1933)**

Born and raised in Massachusetts, Follet was a social worker, innovator, and developer of the classic theory approach to management (also known as the human relations theory) in public administration. Unlike Addams and Goldmark, Follett was from a common household herself. Her work and theories were far advanced for her time. Even though she developed and wrote about her classic management theory in 1926. She wasn't recognized or known for it until after Chester Barnard, in his famous book, "Functions of the Executive," in 1938 emphasized on the importance of the classic management theory, which was unfortunately after her demise.

Her classic theory of management, was very different from the implemented theory of scientific management during that time period. Where the theory of scientific management, proposed by Frederick Taylor in 1912, emphasized on the notion that the driving force behind a man's work was monetary. According to Taylor, in order for man to achieve machine like efficiency, it is necessary to have monetary rewards as incentives. However, Follett's theory contradicted that of Taylors. She believed that the driving force behind a man's work was not just monetary but also affected by social elements of peer pressure, supervisor interaction, appreciation, encouragement and support. A human being was a social creature and was affected by its surroundings and environment (hinting on the laws of antipositivism).

In her opinion, scientific management looked for the law in a given situation, which not only puts the employee under obligation but also the employer. She believed that we could be much more productive if both employee and employer understood the situation, and what needed to be done. Actions should be carried out on that basis rather than being under obligation of an order. Her work was later validated by the results of the Hawthorne experiments, which supported the notion of employees responding to social elements of the work place (peer pressure, appreciation, etc.).

Despite her ground breaking work and knowledge, Mary Parker Follet was not known by many until after her demise. The only factor that didn't work in her favor during that time period was her being a woman in a field that didn't look to women as equals to their male colleagues. She was refused admission into Harvard, due to her gender. Her ideas remained in limited circles and never gained wide recognition. If she was a man with those ideas and views, she would have gained worldwide acknowledgement. This idea of being discredited due to being a

women is evident throughout the history of public administration, since it was not your work that gained you accolades among your peers but your gender had a lot to do with it.

Through the review of some of these prominent women's work that made major contributions in the field of public administration, one thing is evident, bias was a key factor in accepting their work. Gender inequality was evident throughout history. When the same work was conducted and published by a woman, no one accepted it, and years later when the same work was reemphasized by a man in the field it was widely accepted and he was given recognition for it. None of these women received any recognition for their contributions at the time of publishing. Some didn't even live to see the fruit of their labor be accepted by their peers. It is a shame that such brilliant minds had to deal with inequality in such great depths from a field that is full of scholars and academic professionals. It is evident that even though women were always present in the field, their contributions and work was either over looked, dismissed or discredited due to their gender. Women remained in the back seat, while men drove the field of public administration in the direction they deemed fit.

### **Role of women in American Society for Public Administration:**

ASPA, is the primary organization linked with the field of public administration. It was established in 1939. When viewing the role of women in public administration, it is important to analyze their contributions, roles, and participation in the organization. Rubin, in her detailed work on the role of women in ASPA states that "Darrel Pugh divides the history of the society into five periods: the formative years (1939-1955); the pursuit of independence (1955-1963); the maturation of ASPA and the public administration (1964-1972); new directions (1972-1980);

and a decade of doubts (1980s) [...] and a sixth period (according to Rubin), reinvention and restricting” (Rubin, 2000, pp. 62).

The role of women in ASPA from 1939-1972, was similar to their role in the American society. They took a back seat to men and were mostly hired to conduct administrative or secretarial duties (coordinating meetings, conferences, editing work conducted by their male peers, etc.). In 1939, during the so called formative years of the organization, was when change started to take place at a slow pace and Laverne Burchfield was hired as the first female managing editor of the sole journal associated with the organization, *Public Administration Review*. Even though the main reason behind hiring her was a shortage of men due to World War II enlistment. Once in the capacity she stayed and worked with seven different editors in chief of the journal.

#### **Adah Laverne Burchfield (January 18, 1900-October 27, 1981)**

Born and raised in Ohio, in a family that was centered on education, especially in women, she was the first to earn her Ph.D. in political science. Widely known for her work as managing editor on the journal, *Public Administration Review*, like those many women before her time she is not given enough credit for her editorial contributions on the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and the Brownlow Committee Report.

Her work until then focused on international law, but she gained a wide range of experience in the field of political science through her employment and editing work on the “Student’s Guide to Materials in Political Science.” From there she moved onto the TVA, established by the federal government to stimulate the modernization of the economy in the region. Working in her capacity as an economist for the TVA, she assisted in editing of many

reports and providing recommendations on how to build barriers in government to support the initiatives of the TVA. Her work in that region was in a way was her first interaction or step into the world of public administration.

In 1937, the report on “The President’s Committee on Administrative Management,” was published. It is widely known that the committee consisted of three members at that time, Louis Brownlow, Charles Merriam and Luther Gullick. The “Reorganization Act” of 1939, implemented the changes recommended in this report. The most influential being the establishment of the “Executive Office of the President.” However, it is not common knowledge, that it was Burchfield, who edited the report, finalized the content and sent the report to the President.

In 1939, ASPA was created, with Don Price as the first managing editor, it was Burchfield, who took over the position as the first woman managing editor of *Public Administration Review* from 1943-1958. Working as a woman in a male oriented field gave her many challenges that she had to overcome. While working for the journal she worked with 7 different male editors in chief of the journal and kept her position and title even after the field gained its male population back at the end of the World War. Her excellent work ethics and knowledge of editing in the field, earned her respect from her fellow members and recognition by all in the journal and ASPA.

Despite recognition from her immediate peers, it took years for people in the field to know of her name and her accomplishments, again simply due to the fact that she was a woman. Like her predecessors, she dealt with the same issues of gender inequality in public

administration and had to overcome those issues on her own through her work and professionalism. She was relentless like her contemporaries and didn't give up.

The pace of change for the role of women in ASPA, picked up after the formation of the "Task Force on Women in Public Administration" in 1971. The goal of the task force was to ensure women receive equality and equal representation in society, specifically government, academia and research. The task force work diligently for the next three years to figure out the problems at hand and come up with solutions on how to improve conditions for women in the field.

In 1973, the task force was converted into a standing committee for women in public administration. The sole purpose of this committee was "to promote equal employment and educational opportunities for women in the public service, with particular emphasis on developing programs for women in ASPA" (Bishop, 1976, pp. 353). In the following years, the committee worked on many important issues affecting women such as racial equality, equal employment and sexism. In 1976, ASPA elected its first female president, Nesta Gallas.

### **Nesta Gallas (August 29, 1917-August 11, 2012)**

Belonging to an immigrant family from England, Gallas was a head strong women who wanted to make a mark in the man's world. She dealt with a great deal of adversity in the workplace due to her gender. Despite all the hardships, she was appointed as the first female Personnel Director for the City and County of Honolulu. She received her Ph.D. in 1967 in the field of public administration. It seems during this whole time she was being groomed for her upcoming role as the first president of the organization.

Becoming the first female president of ASPA, was not something that just fell into her lap. She had to work hard and show she was capable of doing the job successfully. Gallas, had tried to join ASPA's local chapter in Hawaii in the 1950s. However, she was denied membership due to her gender, since there were no female members' part of the local chapter at that time. During her residence in Hawaii, she tried relentlessly to change the view of the local chapter on gender, and promote equality. She had much more success in New York's local chapter (where she was elected as the local chapter president), after she moved there from Hawaii.

Gallas was elected as president of the ASPA in 1976. She served her year during a time that was critical for women in public administration. During that time ratification of the "Equal Rights Amendment" (ERA) was a major hurdle that women were trying to overcome. Even though ASPA came under criticism for not cancelling conferences in states which had refused to support ERA. Since conferences that were scheduled in advance could not be cancelled due to obligations in the contract. Gallas stood up to the challenge to show the women of ERA that she was there supporter. She convinced the women's advocating groups, that no conferences after 1980 will be held in those states that do not support ERA, thus gaining their support.

Despite Gallas's successful run, the next female president wasn't elected until 1983, named Patricia Florestano. However, her winning didn't get her the accolade that she deserved as she was refused a seat at opening session of the annual ASPA conference that year. This showed clear lack of respect for her and her presidency, which was all due to her gender. Since then, many other women became presidents of the organization and gained seats on the ASPA

council (board of directors) and never again have they been refused a seat on the opening session at the annual meeting.

Just like the field itself, women had to face many struggles and hardships to make themselves known in the organization for public administration (ASPA). Dealing with issues such as equal employment, gender equality and sexism, they made a huge impact and field and overcame most of those obstacles. The reform movement towards women's roles has been a slow one throughout history, but it has made significant impacts. Women in public administration now hold many high ranking positions in both federal and state government (including those of senators, representatives, mayors, secretary of state, governors, etc.). Women currently hold about one third of the local ASPA chapters' presidential positions (Rubin, 2000, pp. 64), and many more have become the organization's president since Gallas in 1976. Therefore ensuring that fair chance is given to all individuals, which is not based on an individual's gender but their accomplishments.

### **Role of Women in Public Administration Research and Publications:**

An important issue to analyze when assessing the role of women in public administration is to view their contributions through research and publications. As evident through the history of the field, women have always taken a back seat to men in all aspects of the field. This back seat was not something they chose but what was given to them by their male colleagues. Recent literature reviews provide different explanations as to why there are lower publication rates for women in public administration, with theories such as, women publishing in other journals or through other mediums, women conducting less collaborative work than their male colleagues, and due to the fact that less women are in supervisory positions, therefore women in lower level



research staff positions are not getting the same opportunities to publish as their seniors or male colleagues.

Research data collected by Rubin (2000), suggests an upward trend from the mid-1900s onwards in the publishing rate of women in public administration. For years, the journal of *Public Administration Review*, was considered the primary source in the field. However, there are many other journals such as *J-Part* and *The Public Productivity and Management Review*, which are considered and used as competent mediums to publish scholarly work in public administration. When the data was analyzed for all three of these journals by Rubin (2000), it was viewed that women were publishing at the same rate, in all three journals, and there was a definite upward trend viewed in the publishing rate of women, when compared from the early 1900s to the 2000s.

Slack, Myers, Nelson, & Sirk (1996) provide another interesting view of why it may seem that women publish less than men in the field of public administration. Their theory is that since women have the highest representation in the ASPA organization, when compared to their representation in federal, state, and academic aspects of public administration, we expect there to be a higher publishing rate for women in the field. It is also an important fact to note that recent studies show women are actually publishing on research in public administration at a higher rate than men in *Public Administration Review*.

Historically, when viewing data on publishing and research, we saw that women tend to collaborate at a lower rate than men. There was no empirical data that established this theory, but perception of male peers of their women colleagues. Men tended to believe that women, particularly those who are mothers, tend to be less committed to working long hours and dedicate

more time to their work compared to their home lives. Therefore men in the field tended to prefer collaborating with a male colleague rather than a women. Another theory, which was based on empirical data was that women tend to hold lower rank positions (assistants and juniors) than those of their male colleagues. Therefore, this caused a higher publishing rate for the senior staff, which were mostly male.

However, the role of women in academia has changed in recent years with women having a big presence in the field of public administration. In addition, more women are now part of the editing and publishing department of the *Public Administrative Review* journal. The fact that there are more women in these significantly high positions, they tend to encourage their fellow and junior staff of women to publish and co-author. This mentor relationship has aided in a significant increase in publishing and research rate for women in the field.

### **Future of Women in Public Administration**

For the future role of women in public administration, there are many factors we still need to explore and work on diligently, issues such as race inequality, unequal pay and the notion of the glass ceiling. One of the major factors being racial inequality. A study conducted by Riccucci (2009), provides data based on analyzing roles of women of color in public administration. Based on her research, she concludes that women of color hold much lower positions throughout all public and private sectors, compared to women that were white. Further work by others in the field such as Bearfield, conclude that “Social equity across agencies, does suggest that gender, as well as race, affects the employment experiences and opportunities of federal workers” (Bearfield, 2009, pp. 383). Therefore race inequality is a major factor of our current society, which we still need to overcome in the field of public administration.

In 1963, the Equal Pay Act, was declared to ensure that every individual was given equal pay, and that no one was discriminated against just because of their race, color, or gender.

According to Kessler's article on the gender wage gap (2012) he quotes the now President of the United States stating that, "Women earn only 77 cents for every dollar men earn, with women of color at even greater disadvantage with 64 cents on the dollar for African American women and 56 cents for Hispanic Women." This data is from this day and age. Yet how often do we hear about this injustice? Mostly this only comes out when a political leader needs the women voters in their corner or is a politician is trying to show sympathy for his women supporters. But what do these politicians or law makers do about his inequality? Nothing. Despite passing of laws and acts, discrimination has been and still exist towards women in public administration.

Another factor that we as women have been dealing with and continue dealing with is that of the "glass ceiling." It is one of those things that you can't argue with or make a formal complaint again, but you know it is there. Whether you are in the public or private sector you have to deal with this. The "glass ceiling" is a notion that you are discriminated against in your professional career due to your gender, race, or color. Even in those organizations, where women break down the barriers and end up at the top, they continue to deal with adversity on a daily basis from within and outside of the organization. Their skills, qualifications and stand on any issue is questioned repeatedly and their authority is weakened due to their gender. Feminists such as Camilla Stivers and Lauren Mullins have written on these issues and tried to bring awareness in society, so we can move beyond this notion.

We have come far as women in public administration but we still have many more years to go, many more factors to overcome before we gain gender equality with the opposite sex in all aspects of the field.

## **Conclusion**

A walk through of history shows us the struggle that women had to deal with in the field of public administration. However, we do see light at the end of the tunnel, where things have changed and we see improvement in our role, when comparing the treatment of women in public administration from early 1900s to now. When analyzing and comparing data of Federal and State government employment rates of women, we see a dramatic increase from the early 1900s to the 2000s. Keeping in mind the influx around World War II, when more women were hired due to men being at war, and the rapid decline in their employment when the men returned to their jobs after the war. But overall there is a steady increase in the rate, especially after the 1990s, more noticeably in women being promoted to Senior Executive Services (SES) in the government. The role of women in academia has increased significantly too, where women hold a strong presence in teaching, researching and authoring publications. While compared to men, the number of women involved in all sectors of public administration are much lower, there is still a significant increase overall, when comparing numbers to where we started from.

Through review of literature on public administration, we have been able to see that women played a significant role from the very beginning of the discipline in the early 1900s. However, it is also evident that their contributions always took a back seat to those of their male contemporaries. The Founding Fathers didn't base the foundations of this country keeping gender equality in mind. Therefore the shaping of the field of public administration gave women

the same unequal treatment. Whether it was Webers view of hierarchy, where his primary emphasis was on an individual or Taylor's view of scientific management that dealt with efficiency, gender inequality was never an important enough issue to be explored or discussed. I am not even sure if society in general perceived gender inequality as a problem, until later on in the mid-1900s. It is a common knowledge that if society in general views a certain gender or race as lower than the other, that that becomes the social norm, it is never questioned as to why it is so. Unfortunately for women, our primary role has always been considered as that of a home maker, care giver, child bearer and nothing more.

Women might not have had to deal with such adversity if society in general didn't view them as subordinates to men. Despite how far we have come in the last decade, we still have many hurdles to overcome as women. One important fact to keep in mind is that we shouldn't try to ignore these issues or pretend they don't exist, the only way to overcome these remaining factors affecting women is by facing them and fighting them just like our predecessors did. Our predecessors worked far too hard for us to stop the fight half way through or to give up, especially because they showed us by example that change is possible.

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