

Public Administration and Society

Critical Issues in American Governance

Third Edition

Richard C. Box



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PREFACE

This book is designed as an introduction to the political and economic environment of public administration and its relationship to the daily work of public professionals. Many who teach in public administration find that students have little knowledge of the *historical, societal, and structural basis* of the American system of government and its effects on key issues facing today's public administrators. This is the specific area of knowledge addressed by the book.

Instead of the emphasis on management topics found in many introductory public administration texts, this book provides a *macro-level view* of the cultural, political, institutional, and economic context of public administration, within a framework that is *historical and critical*. This view is grounded in the premise that future leaders in the field may significantly influence governmental policy and its implementation, so they should have broad understanding of matters beyond carrying out micro-level management tasks. The framework is historical because contemporary values and practices have been shaped by past actions; it is critical in bringing to the reader's attention the interplay of opposing ideas through time. The book deals with American society and public administration because that is its intended audience and because the context of the public sector in the United States is quite different from that of other nations.

Though the importance of nonprofit and private-sector organizations and citizen efforts in non-governmental, "civil society" is recognized, the focus here is on *public governance*, goal-setting and action potentially affecting all people in a defined geographic area. There is a unique character to a setting in which people act jointly as a nation, state, region, local public agency, or neighborhood, a joint character that makes it unlike other human activities. Given this focus, attention can be directed to understanding factors that shape the work of public organizations and how students and practitioners of public administration can contribute to constructive change.

People become accustomed to their personal and work lives, often doing what needs to be done without thinking too deeply about its meaning. We take for granted the complex web of human organizations, physical structures such as streets, utility systems, and buildings, commercial networks that supply such basics as food, clothing, and an almost infinite variety of other products, and the laws, procedures, and expectations about correct behavior specific to our national culture, that make all this work as well as it does. On occasion, an unusual event, conversation, media presentation, or written material will jolt us out of the routine of daily habit, prompting reexamination of our lives and the society around us.

Another factor leading to unthinking acceptance of the familiar is pressure to conform to the norms of society, making it difficult to question "the way things are." Sometimes scholars, the media, or advocates of change bring to our attention fundamental *contradictions* between our beliefs about such matters as fairness, democracy, or protection of the natural world, and the way organizations and society actually function on a day-to-day basis in relation to treatment of human

beings and the physical environment. Though it can be risky for public professionals to call attention to such contradictions, as they advance in their careers and take on broader responsibilities, they may sometimes find it necessary to question the status quo.

An assumption made in this book is that some of its readers are, or will be later in their careers, in a position to influence the course of public-service practice or research, with constructive impacts on the lives of citizens. A crucial skill for those who want to make a difference in the world is *critical thought*. The term “critical” is not used here to mean negative or judgmental, but probing and analytical, identifying contradictions between commonly held beliefs and the practices and perspectives we discover in the course of learning. Narratives and readings in this book are intended to facilitate critical, skeptical thought about the uses of power and resources in public-sector governance, giving readers tools for improving citizen self-determination in a democratic society.

Though these materials introduce questions about economic, political, and social systems that may cause some readers discomfort, the objective is not to provoke cynicism about the public sector or a defensive rejection of views that challenge the status quo. Instead, the intent is to give readers a glimpse into the richness of the unique American experiment in *democracy and self-governance* and opportunities to contribute personally. This experiment is continuous and sometimes appears chaotic, harsh, or unjust, but this open-endedness and constant debate over what is right and good are its strengths. At the core are a set of beliefs about human freedom and the relationship of the individual to society that were revolutionary at the time of the nation’s founding, beliefs that today are often admired in principle but can be difficult to achieve. The challenge for students of public administration is to understand the nature of this society, clarify our value commitments as people in public service, and find ways to carry them out in daily practice.

The reader looking for clear answers to complex problems of public action may be disappointed by this book, because questions are raised here as well as answered. Public administration is not a science, in which many problems have one clear answer, so the best we can do is offer a framework for understanding and to provoke creative reflection. It is hoped that teachers and students will use the book as a starting point to link together other readings and discussion of the societal environment of public administration, encouraging active thought and questioning.

In one book it is impossible to fully develop the themes presented here or to offer all perspectives on each theme. The field is vibrant with contending descriptions of what seems to be happening in society and in public organizations at all levels. There is diversity of thought on preferred courses of action and possible outcomes, as well as academic disputes about how to research and write about these phenomena. The reader may find it helpful to think about the following three questions while using this book—they are central to the field and to the materials that follow.

1. *What ideas and events have shaped contemporary public administration?* This question assumes the present is better understood with knowledge of the past and this knowledge may help make a better future. It also assumes there are a variety of perspectives on events that have shaped public administration and that knowledge of the past is a matter of interpretation rather than searching for a single, “correct” explanation.
2. *What is the interaction between American society and the action alternatives available to public-service practitioners?* Public employees are not free to do whatever they wish; funds to operate their organizations come from a public that has expectations about appropriate public action in society.
3. *As public-service practitioners, whom do we serve, and for what purposes?* Is it current political and economic leaders, or a larger public whose voices are not often heard in

public decision-making settings, or some conception of the long-term interests of all the people? Answers to this question in a given situation can make quite a difference in how decisions are made and what actions are taken by public agencies.

In search of useful ways to approach these questions, the book is organized into six parts. In Part I, three chapters set the stage conceptually for later readings. Chapter 1 describes the scope and content of public administration as a field of study and practice, Chapter 2 explores the societal environment of public administration over time, and Chapter 3 discusses concepts of citizenship, democracy, and ways people structure units of government to serve particular values or goals.

Parts II through VI of this book focus on crucial, often controversial thematic areas that are important for understanding public administration. It would be impractical to cover the full sweep of history and development of issues that affect contemporary events. Instead, these five parts address areas of knowledge that are especially relevant to students of public affairs. Each part begins with a narrative outlining key concepts in the thematic area, followed by readings offering a broad overview of issues that have significant impacts on public administration theory and practice. Readings 3.3, “The Nature of Community Governance,” and 5.3, “Practitioners,” have been updated to reflect current conditions. In addition, some concepts were removed because they were confusing when read outside the context of the book from which these readings are taken.

The five thematic areas are: events that created the American governmental system and continue to shape its operation today; the relationship between individuals and the larger community; the interactions between public professionals, public organizations, and public policy; values public professionals hold that may influence public policy and administrative action; and perspectives on the role of the public professional in a democratic society.

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PART I

INTRODUCTION TO THE CENTRAL ISSUES

CONTEXT, CHANGE, AND DEMOCRACY

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SCOPE AND CONTENT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

People in contemporary society are surrounded by information about aspects of public life. The media—including newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and the Internet—offer many stories every day about politics and government at the international, national, state, regional, and local levels. It would seem that people would be saturated with information about the public sector. Readers of this book have by definition more than an ordinary interest in public-sector matters, so we might expect them to be quite knowledgeable about government.

Instead, what we often find with the public and even with students of political science and experienced public-sector professionals, is knowledge of scattered, seemingly unrelated facts about various parts of the public sector, but only sketchy awareness of governmental history, systems, structures, and how government (the legislative, administrative, and judicial parts of the public sector) works. Public administration ethicist Terry Cooper notes that people come to the university with “a wooden, oversimplified conception of the way public policy is formed and implemented” (2006, 76).

This is often true of graduate students as well, even those with significant experience in the public sector. Several years ago, an MPA student in the author’s class used a vivid metaphor to describe this phenomenon, as she said her elementary, high school, and college undergraduate course work in American government left her with a “pastel, pink-and-blue” view of the nation’s governance systems, a view that was simple and did not convey a sense of the American governmental experience as an exciting, often passionate, on-going debate over fundamental issues.

Many public-service practitioners play a significant role in guiding public agencies, policies, and programs, impacting the lives of real people on a daily basis. If these practitioners do not have a broad understanding of their institutions, what can be said about the outcomes of their work? Without such knowledge, on what basis do they make decisions about their public-service roles in a democratic society? In the absence of this knowledge, results of actions taken by public-service practitioners may be based on doing the same thing that has always been done, or on intuition about what might be best, or on selection of alternatives that seem most acceptable to those in positions of power. Any of these can be useful guides to action in a particular situation, but without greater breadth of knowledge, it is difficult to sort through the options in an informed, meaningful way.

[“Public-service practitioner,” instead of “public administrator” or “public professional,” may be used to indicate that not all public employees are administrators or in occupations usually considered professional. “Administrator” suggests a person who plans and supervises the work of others, and a “professional” is someone who applies a recognized body of knowledge to daily practice. However, in this book these terms are often used interchangeably.

More importantly, the people referred to by use of these terms are career public employees selected for their jobs on the basis of job-related education and experience rather than personal affiliation with, or loyalty to, a political party or leader. They are not to be confused with elected officials/politicians, or their political appointees (such as cabinet members, department heads, or

4 INTRODUCTION TO THE CENTRAL ISSUES

appointed subordinates) who are in office during the term of a particular elected leader and are chosen, at least in part, on the basis of acceptance of the beliefs of the leader or party.]

The paradox of limited knowledge of the public sector in the midst of a flood of information suggests problems with the media and the educational system, but that is outside the scope of this book, which is about public-sector governance. It is assumed here that people involved in career public service have a greater responsibility to understand the nature of our society, democracy, and government than do most citizens, in part because such knowledge can improve professional practice. But beyond this practical value, to keep a society intact someone needs to carry the knowledge of how it came to be what it is, passing it on to others. People who do the work of public service are well positioned to play this role.

INSTRUMENTAL AND CONTEXTUAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Many think of public administration as a largely technical, applied field of study and practice, all about how to do budgeting and manage personnel, send the Social Security checks out on time, or keep the potholes filled. This view of public administration is *instrumental*, that is, it views public administration as a tool used by elected representatives of the citizenry to accomplish public goals. This is not inaccurate, because a significant part of public administration can be reasonably described in this way, but it is incomplete. The instrumental view leaves out the sometimes difficult and conflictual process of identification of public purposes and how public employees interact with citizens and elected officials in helping shape governmental action. It assumes that millions of public employees wait quietly at their desks for orders to be handed to them from a mysterious other place, and that these orders are fully developed by knowledgeable people who comprehend the social world and public needs in their full complexity.

Of course, that is not how things work. Instead, describing public purposes and taking action toward fulfilling them in the daily “lifeworld” of citizens is a dynamic, repeating process. In this process, public professionals interact with peers, elected representatives, and citizens in formulating and reformulating programmatic goals and plans for action, putting them into effect, and revising them during implementation. New circumstances can emerge at any point, causing perceptions of the initial problem or the public action to change, for reasons that may operate singly or in combination, such as:

1. New information emerges about the problem (an example would be discovering there are many more homeless people than first thought when a program to house and feed them in cold weather was created);
2. The program produces on-the-ground results suggesting the need for modification (continuing the homeless example, maybe few homeless people want to participate and a significant number are still freezing to death on the streets);
3. The program causes peoples’ perceptions of the situation or public action to change (some political leaders and media personalities say the program is pointless because the homeless would rather freeze, but a citizen’s advocacy group thinks the program should be expanded by picking people up and taking them to shelters); and/or,
4. The broader social context of the problem has changed such that the program should be modified (for example, the economy weakens and even more people are living on the streets).

The process of identifying a problem, discussing potential solutions, finding resources, putting the plan into action, and in each phase accommodating new information, ideas, and perceptions, can

be top-down, operating at the level of political and economic leaders and higher-level administrators. It can also take place from the bottom up, with citizens and public employees generating ideas from their daily experience, and top-down and bottom-up activity may occur simultaneously.

As public employees engage in these processes, they move outside the common role expectation of the value-neutral tool used to achieve predetermined ends. They are the people with detailed knowledge of techniques and practices and they also have considerable knowledge of social conditions and the needs of the population. This knowledge of public needs may differ from that of elected representatives because it is gained in forms of contact and interaction that are different. Nevertheless, it is important in shaping actions taken by public legislative bodies and tailoring services to the people who receive them.

So, commonly held views about public administration may not take in the full reality of the field. Public administration is not only instrumental—public-sector decisions and actions are often complex, involve multiple possibilities, and change with time; and public-sector practitioners are involved in determining what government does in addition to how it does it. Public employees work in political, economic, and social environments shaped in part by past events and accumulated ideas, values, and cultural preferences about the purposes and operation of the public sector. Those who know something about these environments may have a greater chance of succeeding because they are better able to craft options and alternatives appropriate for their circumstances. As a bonus, they may find that deeper understanding of the broader society leads to greater satisfaction in their careers and as citizens outside the professional role.

Providing a portion of that deeper understanding of the *social context* of public administration is a focus of this book. The reader will find that standard management subjects in public administration are not covered here. This is because the book is not about management techniques for motivating employees, designing or evaluating a public agency program, understanding financial relationships between the national government and state and local governments, and so on. Instead, the book is about *macro*-level aspects of American society that influence how management of public agencies takes place, how history and practice have brought us to this point, and what options there may be within this context for future action. This is not dry history or settled fact to be memorized. It is a complex, tumultuous story, full of intrigue, interesting lives, grand purposes, and failures and successes, stretching through historical time and across several scholarly disciplines. Given this scope it is possible here to highlight only a few areas, emphasized because of their particular importance to the public sector. Readers are encouraged to use the book as a starting point, identifying events or ideas not included that they think should be discussed as well.

THE UNIQUE PUBLIC SECTOR

People often have trouble conceptualizing the idea of public administration as a whole, aside from specific tasks or functions such as issuing drivers' licenses. This is not surprising, because public administration covers such a broad range of activities that its boundaries and contents can easily seem unclear. If we visualize ourselves in an introductory public administration course early in the semester, the professor may ask people to introduce themselves. In turn, students describe their education, work history, and future career interests. In a typical introductory course it is common to find, for example, a captain in the military, a program manager in a nonprofit social service organization, a police officer or firefighter, a person who has recently graduated from college, a state highway engineer, a child welfare caseworker, a land use planner for a local community, a wildlife manager for the national government, and a person who has worked for years in the private sector and wishes to move into public service.

Today, the boundaries between the three sectors of institutional and economic endeavor—private, public, and nonprofit—can be shifting and indistinct. This is due to several trends, including: the public sector contracting out work to nonprofit and private organizations, growth in the nonprofit sector, and increased emphasis in the public sector on businesslike efficiency. Our imaginary introductory course includes students representing experience in all three sectors—this cross-sectoral interest in education for public-sector management has become common in MPA programs. In many areas of management, concepts and techniques carry across sectors. For example, not only are there elements of leadership, motivation, accounting, human resource management, and information technology that cross sectoral boundaries, much of the innovation in these areas comes from the private sector and is adapted for use in the public sector. These similarities, and the cross-sectoral usefulness of certain management techniques, have led some to believe that management is management, regardless of sectoral location. However, a feature of public administration that is unique, that differentiates it from the private and nonprofit sectors, is that it is *public*, which indicates it involves every person in a defined geographic area. This simple word carries with it implications at the level of management practices—for example, the problem of potential intrusion of partisan politics into administration of personnel recruitment and hiring, or requirements for published, independent audits of the financial practices of public organizations. At a broader level, it implies a democratic expectation of citizen access to the process of policy making and implementation.

Though the effects of the public character of organizations on management are important, it is at the broader, macro level of organizational purpose and the relationship of organizations to the people they serve that publicness becomes not just important, but crucial. Those who argue that the sectors are becoming more alike and that management is management are partially correct when they consider technical aspects of management practice. But when attention shifts to organizational purpose and relationships with those served by public administration, we find clear differences between sectors. These differences appear in areas such as identifying problems to be addressed and who is involved in problem solving, procedures for decision making and who the decision makers will be, to whom and in what ways organizations are accountable for their performance, whose interests shape organizational goals, and what appropriate roles are for public-service practitioners.

Often, action taken by public-sector decision makers is described as being in “the public interest.” This is a vague, poorly defined term that might mean only that a particular outcome pleases or benefits the person who uses it (“I think this is in the public interest!”), but it can also be a useful idea with more general application. We can distinguish two types of public interest, aggregative and substantive. The aggregative public interest consists of the sum of individual preferences, the pooled wishes of everyone who expresses a preference. Voting and surveys are ways to find the aggregative public interest; since they rarely produce unanimity on a particular issue, we usually recognize the public interest as the preference expressed by the greatest number of people. The advantage of identifying the public interest in this way is that it is relatively clear and straightforward. The disadvantage is that the aggregative public interest can reflect short-term and largely uninformed public opinion.

The substantive public interest is a more elusive concept, consisting of whatever would be in the best interests of the public over a longer period of time. How to determine what is best and for whom becomes the problem, often resulting in considerable disagreement over the public interest. One way to think of the substantive public interest is that the majority of people would choose it if they had full information on an issue, the opportunity to interact with others whose interests may be different, and time to consider the long-term effects of each potential policy alternative.

This version of the substantive public interest describes a decision-making process very different from voting or opinion surveys, one that involves well-informed people whose views have been shaped by dialogue with others in addition to their own preconceived interests. Unsurprisingly, achieving this level of sophistication in determining the public interest is difficult and unusual. However, the concept can be used to inform our thinking about democratic decision making and how individual preferences are taken into account in the public sector.

The ways citizens, elected officials, and public employees involved with a particular organization approach these issues are shaped by American expectations about government, expectations formed by more than two hundred years of dealing with balancing demands for open, democratic governance and desires for efficient, effective management. The American attitude about the relationship of the public sector to the broader society is quite different from that in many other countries. For example, there are countries (such as in Scandinavia and Europe) in which people more readily accept the prominence of government in social affairs and government is considered a legitimate, permanent entity with a life of its own. In some Asian countries, the relationship of the public sector to society is framed within the cultural expectation that contributing to the collective well-being of society is more important than the interests of the individual. In the United States, the size, functions, even the right to exist of the public sector may be questioned, and government is often viewed as a threat to the freedom of individuals. In this environment of emphasis on protecting the rights of the individual from government, governmental action that to people in other countries might seem constructive, may instead appear inappropriate to Americans.

COERCION AND GOVERNMENT

Government cannot act without resources, and a large percentage of public-sector operating revenue comes from taxation of individuals. Taxation is often a focal point for concern about how large government has become and the extent of its intrusion into individual lives. This concern is expressed by politicians (such as Republicans in Congress in the 1990s who attempted to cut back or eliminate many public agencies and programs), it appears on television and radio news and talk shows, and it is reflected in public opinion polling about citizen mistrust of government. It motivates people who refuse to pay taxes, people who organize protests against the government, and in extreme form people like Timothy McVeigh, who was executed for destroying the Federal Building in Oklahoma City with a bomb in 1995, killing more than 160 people. In the United States, the role of the public sector in society is always in dispute, making it somewhat unstable and changeable, a work in progress. This situation can be thought of as an inefficient waste of time, or as a sign of a democracy that is constantly revitalized.

This discussion leads to identification of a key feature of the public sector that distinguishes it from the private and nonprofit sectors. For everyone in a specific geographic area, participation in the public sector is *mandatory and enforced coercively*. It is not necessarily specific services that are coercive, though some are, as illustrated by a person being arrested on suspicion of having committed a crime, or having one's child taken away by a government agency because of child abuse. People attending a particular publicly funded state university are not coerced to do so because there are other choices available in higher education. However, if a person decides that the public sector should not fund higher education and refuses to pay a portion of his or her income taxes equivalent to the percentage of the state budget used for that purpose, he or she can expect there will be consequences, including financial penalties and/or imprisonment.

In this way, citizens are coerced into participating in the support of public institutions, complying with the will of the majority, whether or not they agree and whether or not they personally benefit

from a particular governmental service or program, on the grounds that it is good for all the people (in the case of state-funded higher education, an argument would be that an educated citizenry benefits everyone). The word “coercive” usually carries a negative feeling of something that is forced upon people against their will. But in public governance in a democratic society, at least in theory people agree to participate in the collective activity of the whole. If they wish, individuals may join together with others to change the way government is operated and the purposes it serves. At the subnational level, they may also choose to move to a different unit of government (state, county, city). The public sector must in this sense be mandatory, coercive, because there is no other way to operate government. It would fail if people were able selectively to withhold support for specific functions.

In the private sector, each customer chooses whether or not to buy a product or service. We can debate whether these choices are freely made or whether an economy that depends on growth in consumption trains people from an early age to want an endless supply of consumer goods. Nevertheless, there is a range of choices in a private economy and people choose what they want. The nonprofit sector includes associational, professional, and business organizations (examples: a neighborhood association formed to improve the quality of life in an area within a city; the American Medical Association; a city’s Chamber of Commerce), mission-oriented organizations (philanthropic, charitable, social service, arts and culture, religious training, or education), and a variety of other organizations, including recreation and leisure nonprofits such as celebrity fan clubs, sports organizations, and so on. Some of these organizations are difficult to distinguish from those in the private sector, since they have similar purposes but differ only in the lack of profit accumulation for their owners. However, they all share with the private sector the central characteristic that their members participate voluntarily—the centrality of this difference from the public sector is noted by frequent use of the term *voluntary sector* to describe nonprofits.

Again, the mandatory, coercive nature of the public sector is how it must be to function. The intent here is not to portray this basic characteristic negatively; it is the way people join together to create the sort of community, state, and nation they want. The intent is to highlight the importance of this collective characteristic, both to distinguish the public sector from the nonprofit and private sectors, and to emphasize what this means for the relationship of public-service practitioners and citizens.

Public-service practitioners who are aware of the coercive nature of government have the opportunity to be particularly sensitive to ways decisions are made and how open or closed the process is to those who might want to participate. They can also take into account the impacts on people’s lives of implementation of policies and programs, working to soften negative impacts and make government more responsive to people’s preferences. In these ways, public-service practitioners recognize the special responsibility that comes from participation in an endeavor that includes, by definition, everyone within a defined area.

SCOPE AND CONTENT OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENTS

Let us move from describing the public sector by contrasting it with other sectors, to examining the scope and content of public administration. As an applied field of study, grounded in delivery of public services by governmental agencies, the study and practice of public administration draws concepts and techniques from other academic disciplines and areas of professional practice. Examples include the academic disciplines of political science, philosophy, history, economics, and sociology, and the professional fields of planning, social work, criminology, engineering, accounting, and many more. It was common throughout the development of American public

administration in the twentieth century for academicians to characterize this diversity negatively as a lack of focus rather than regarding it as open and vibrant. Some wish for clearly defined substantive content and rigorous quantitative research methods that might make public administration more respected in the academic world alongside disciplines such as economics or political science. Others worry about the fragmentation of the field into specializations with their own journals, organizations, and meetings (i.e., ethics, human resources, policy, financial management, critical and postmodern theory, intergovernmental management) as the public sector grows larger and more complex.

Despite this desire for clarity and academic respectability, public administration, both as academic study and practice, keeps growing, fragmenting, and drawing ideas and inspiration from whatever sources are helpful for understanding problems and solutions in public service. This is natural enough in a field that involves so many people in so many settings and occupations. Consider the size and complexity of the American public sector. Though it is common to think of the public sector as mostly the huge national government supplemented by a variety of state and local governments, concentrating on the national level is misleading. In 2012, in addition to the national government and the fifty-one states, there were more than 89,000 units of local government. These included school districts (12,884), cities (19,522), counties (3,031), special districts (37,203), and townships (16,364) (U.S. Census Bureau 2012).

In addition to the quantity of units of government, the number of people working in these organizations is impressive as well. In 2010 there were 3,007,938 national government civilian employees and 4,377,777 (full-time equivalent; includes full-time and part-time) state government employees (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). At the same time, there were 12,203,840 (full-time equivalent) local government employees. Of these, 6,802,000 (full-time equivalent) worked in elementary and secondary education, so the number of local government employees not in K–12 education was 5,401,840 (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Thus, national government civilian employment was 55.7 percent the size of local government employment outside of K–12 education. Adding state government employment to local (not including K–12) yields 9,779,617 employees; national civilian employment was 30.8 percent the size of this figure.

[It is not uncommon for people to be surprised to hear that schools are units of local government. Their status is confusing because: school districts are administrative arms of the state formed to deliver education services; they receive state funding; to varying degrees their activities are controlled by the state; some are dependent on *general-purpose* units of local government such as cities for their financing or governance; and their organizational structures and boundaries can be changed by the state. Despite all this, running the schools has been a jealously guarded area of local control reaching back into pre-Revolutionary America and school districts are indeed *single-purpose* units of local government. They are governed by locally elected boards that levy taxes and hire and fire administrators, teachers, and staff.]

All these public-sector workers are not necessarily in organizations with similar functions, goals, values, relationships with the surrounding society, and technical/professional employee backgrounds. On the contrary, the public sector is amazingly diverse in functions and professional specializations. A typical local government, for example the city government in a city of 50,000 people, may have employees with education and experience in areas such as (to list only a few): public works, including specializations in sewer, water, and street system design and maintenance; parks, including specializations in park acquisition, design, construction and maintenance, recreation programs, and programs for senior citizens; police services, including crime investigation, traffic patrol, communications and dispatch, community relations, and crime laboratory services; economic development, including public information, financial incentives for new business, and

construction of industrial development areas; financial services such as accounting, computer systems, utility billing, and debt management; land-use planning, including long-range planning, development plan and subdivision design, review of architectural designs and proposals for modification of historic buildings, and zoning review of setbacks, signs, and variances from standards; fire suppression and inspection of buildings for fire safety; review of building plans for proposed structures and inspection of materials and practices as they are built; human resources, including recruitment, classification, health insurance and promotion, and labor contract negotiation and management; legal services; libraries; and so on.

County, special district (taxing authorities providing one or a few services, such as a school district or drainage district), and state agencies may also serve this typical city and its surroundings in functional areas such as: prisons and probation, child and adult safety and welfare, school systems, hospitals, transportation planning and provision of roads and mass transit, air and water quality, sales tax administration, property taxation, and so on. Overlaid on these governmental structures and systems are a range of national government services related to the aged and disabled, veterans, safety of food, air, water, vehicles, toys, workplaces, and the like; protection of wildlife and the natural environment; and other functions including those that are traditionally and uniquely national: defense, foreign relations, and regulation of interstate and international trade.

To make the overall picture a little more complicated, though the lists above allocate functions neatly to local, state, and national agencies, many services can be provided by different levels of government or by more than one level in the same geographic area. Examples include water and sewer service, various aspects of law enforcement, corrections and probation, transportation, and programs for seniors. Further, much public-sector work is actually carried out by people employed in nonprofit and private organizations that contract with public agencies. This intersectoral complexity has led to the blurring of boundaries noted by many authors in the public administration literature, some of whom believe there is, as a result, not much difference today between the public sector and other sectors.

It seems almost hopeless to search for common ideas and practices that stretch across this complexity of history, purposes, and perspectives on society and its problems, but this is what the field of public administration attempts to do. The common thread is service to the public, to all the people in a defined place, and the responsibility that comes with it for sensitivity to societal values.

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CHAPTER 2

TIME AND CHANGE

The Environment of Public Administration

Most of us think of our circumstances in current terms first. We concentrate on things that press on us at this moment instead of thinking about the past and factors that may have brought us to the present situation. The present, though, is composed of more than recent events and issues that concern us now. It is a complex web of relationships built on shared understandings of reality that have been constructed by many people over long periods of time. An example from organizational practice would be the conduct of negotiations between an employer and employees about conditions of employment such as wages and benefits. These negotiations can be complex to the point of being confusing, and the people involved are likely to be caught up in the many details of working with bargaining team members to establish positions, discussing disagreements with those on the other side of the negotiations, and so on.

At some point, questions may arise about the best positions to take that do not have answers within the current framework of issues on the table. To find solid answers, participants may need knowledge of the practices of other organizations, the development of labor law over an extended period of time, the history of the organizations involved, and the opinions or policies of board members or elected representatives responsible for approving a settlement. In addition, it would be helpful for bargaining representatives to be aware of the context of labor relations in the United States. In the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, workers struggled with corporations and the government for the right to organize and bargain for wages and benefits, and they advocated laws regulating working conditions. The courts and police were used to stop labor actions and break up workers' gatherings, sometimes violently. Today's labor laws reflect the current balance of legal rights between labor and management that developed from these events.

Public-sector bargaining has a short history. The sort of labor relations and bargaining practiced in the private sector for much of the twentieth century did not begin in earnest in the public sector until the 1960s. In part this was because of the earlier belief, still held by some, that public-sector employees work for all the people, the people are sovereign and can create whatever sort of government they want, and their employees should not have the right to bargain for conditions of employment.

The balance between labor and management in the private and public sectors, in national, state, or local government, and in any particular organization, is not settled, static, or value-free. Every bargaining situation, legislative debate about public policy in relation to labor, and arbitrator's decision or court case resolving a labor dispute is another entry in the ongoing story of the labor-management relationship in American society, a society in which the status of labor in relation to management is not assured or secure. This summary of the American labor-management story is just that, a summary, brief and incomplete, and to become knowledgeable in this area requires a significant investment of time. The options open to bargainers are in part determined by this story

and the bargainer with this knowledge may have an advantage in framing proposals that will be useful for all parties, including mediators, arbitrators, and judges.

PREDISPOSITIONS AND FREEDOM OF THOUGHT

The bargaining example presents just a quick sketch of the application of knowledge about history and society to one area of organizational practice. A list of all such applications in the public sector would include many thousands of entries. Each one is a story, a narrative, about how people have constructed the practices we are familiar with today. These socially constructed narratives reflect a degree of current common understanding, understanding that includes a range of opinions, ideas, and disagreement, and the potential for constant change as new situations, information, and interpretations develop. As Robert Bellah and colleagues noted in the book *Habits of the Heart*:

Narrowly professional social science has given us valuable information about many aspects of contemporary society, but it often does so with little or no sense of history. . . . Yet what we need from history, and why the social scientist must also, among other things, be a historian, is not merely comparable information about the past, but some idea of how we have gotten from the past to the present, in short, a narrative. Narrative is a primary and powerful way by which to know about a whole. In an important sense, what a society (or a person) is, is its history. (1996, 302)

We live in a society shaped by the experience of emigrating from Europe to find new ways of living with greater opportunity and freedom. This story is more complex today because of the success of the United States as a place that attracts people from all over the world. The concepts of citizenship, governing, and governmental structure that appealed to European immigrants over three hundred years ago do not always fit contemporary situations or cultures, and contemporary events are reshaping our earlier understandings. Even so, the story of the creation of governmental systems in the United States has a powerful influence on today's public-sector systems and practices and on public expectations about the work of public employees. When, for example, a practitioner believes program changes should be made and wants to suggest new policies or expenditures, the likely reception she or he will receive depends on the attitudes of organizational superiors or elected officials. These attitudes are shaped to some extent by enduring American debates about the role of government and its career employees in society.

Attitudes toward government and citizenship do not form out of nowhere, suddenly appearing in each individual as if by magic. Attitudes vary from person to person, but there is an identifiable core of American thought. Most people are only dimly aware of the origins of their attitudes and do not consciously make a connection between historical events and current beliefs and opinions. The relationship between citizens and government is a constant feature of our collective social environment. Discussions about levels of taxation, whether to provide social services such as health care through public programs or mandates, the extent to which the use of private property or money is controlled by government regulation, what role citizens can or should play in governing themselves, and thousands of other matters large and small revolve around the question of the appropriate role of the public sector in relation to private citizens. This was a central part of founding-era American debates about the new Constitutional form of government. It is central to public life today, as individual freedom and the needs of the collective community are in constant tension, subject to debate and shifting balances of compromise.

We cannot be sure whether or not history is developmental, that is, whether human society is moving progressively toward a “better” future, whatever that could mean. There are recurring patterns to human history and certain things, such as science and technology, are clearly becoming more complex and sophisticated. There is no way for us to know, however, whether we are moving toward some desirable condition (such as a peaceful, humane world), an unpleasant condition (disorder, institutional disintegration, war) or simply experiencing relatively random events. Though it is useful to know the past to understand the present, people have many choices before them today, choices that are not fixed or determined by the past.

History does not appear to be determinative, that is, it does not seem that current events must take one particular form because of what preceded them. This is the case even though we are the product of our personal experiences, our experiences have been influenced by the ideas of those around us, and our ideas are influenced by people of earlier generations. One only has to study or travel to areas where people have cultural beliefs different from our own to understand the depth and strength of the effect of a specific cultural/historical background. A person’s beliefs can include, among other things, a sense of identification based upon national, regional, or local citizenship, a particular generation, or socioeconomic class. A person is also likely to have beliefs about the appropriate relationship of citizens to government and about how public organizations and institutions should function.

These beliefs can function as *predispositions*, affecting how we respond to questions about the roles and behavior of citizens, political leaders, and public employees. Despite the strength of these predispositions, people are able to make choices that express independence of thought and vary from patterns of the past. Awareness of predispositions allows people to build upon the past to create a different future, choosing from a broader range of options than they would without this knowledge.

RECURRING THEMES

An important assumption of this book is that people who understand their societal and historical context are better prepared to act in ways that fit the needs of the present. There are recurring themes in public administration theory that can in part be explained, even anticipated, by reflecting on underlying ideas in society. Often, earlier ideas are reintroduced in updated form to deal with current circumstances, and some of what is thought of as new today consists of repackaging of values and practices familiar some time ago. Recognizing repeating themes is one part of understanding the context of public administration.

An example is the current idea that government should be “run like a business.” Americans have sought businesslike efficiency in government for some time, alongside competing values such as democratic governance and social equity. Values may conflict: a program to prepare poorly educated low-income people for good jobs may be inefficient on a cost-per-person basis, but it may serve the value of social equity, assisting those who do not do well in a market economy. The idea that government should be efficient has been a primary reason given for many “reforms,” including creating the national government’s civil service system in the late nineteenth century, the strong mayor, commission, and council-manager plans for local government organization in the early twentieth century, restructuring the office of the president in the 1930s and 1940s; and so on through actions being taken today at all levels of government, such as contracting out service production to nonprofit and private companies and putting greater emphasis on measuring government performance.

Almost no one thinks it is a good idea for government to be intentionally inefficient, but a narrow

focus on efficiency can have both intended and unintended effects. The movement to reform local government, making it more efficient, is a case in point. One of the ideas proposed during this movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the council-manager plan. It is similar to the administrative system used in school districts and other special local and regional districts. The council-manager plan uses a unitary chain of command instead of the separation-of-powers model found in the national government, state governments, and many local governments. In the council-manager plan, the city council is structurally equivalent to the board of directors of a business and the appointed professional city manager is responsible for much of the daily operation of the city, a position parallel to that of the chief administrative officer or general manager in a private business. This contrasts with separated legislative and executive powers (used in many local governments in variations on the mayor-council model), in which the branches (council and mayor in cities) operate somewhat independently with defined spheres of authority and the chief administrative officers are elected.

The council-manager plan, based on the structure of private firms, was created to bring efficiency to American cities (Stillman 1974). It was intended to shift the emphasis in cities from political responsiveness to cost-effective professional management. It was part of an effort by business and professional leaders to counter the influence of local *bosses* who created powerful political organizations, often supported by groups of recent immigrants to the United States. These political *machines* used governing techniques the professional/business class thought were corrupt and not in the best interests of all community residents. Thus, the value of efficiency became a tool in a conflict between people with different visions of what government is for—professional and business leaders favored what they saw as efficiency, and some politicians favored responding to the needs of specific groups and individuals in their communities. The original council-manager plan included electing each city council member by citywide vote instead of by districts, to make it harder for machine candidates to be elected from ethnic neighborhoods. Mayors were appointed by councils from among their members instead of being separately elected for the position; this tended to reduce the mayor's strength as a leader.

There are some interesting themes in this story. Efficiency, of course—it was central to the people who proposed and promoted the council-manager plan and other reforms. They also believed that reforms could promote active citizenship and democracy (Schachter 1997), but the core idea was that government could be made efficient if organized, structured, in a certain way. The use of governmental structure in the service of specific values such as efficiency, political responsiveness, or protecting against or strengthening executive power appears and reappears in different forms throughout the history of the American public sector. This structural perspective, however, is something of an abstraction, a summary that overlays the human concerns and actions that it describes. At the level of human concerns and actions, the council-manager plan may be viewed as an effort by the upper-middle class to counter increasing influence of people of lower socioeconomic status, including recent immigrants. Elements of the plan had the effect of dampening open public debate on issues of importance, leading to successful efforts in the past two or three decades to reverse parts of the system. This is an instance of a value—democratic openness to the public—being reasserted to create a new balance in the relationship of government and citizens.

Calls for greater efficiency in government are not new. Sometimes they mean just what they say—government should be more efficient—and sometimes the underlying message is a conflict over power, money, and control. We are at a height of interest today in “running government like a business”; the origins of this recent trend toward efficiency as a dominant value stretch back several decades, but the impact has been felt in the United States most intensely in the last two decades of the twentieth century and into the early twenty-first century. This phenomenon will

be discussed later in the book and it is not especially useful just now to label it “bad” or “good,” but rather to observe that it has advantages and disadvantages as well as lessons to teach about American attitudes toward the relationship of government and the private sector.

The point is that history matters, that knowledge of past events and ideas helps public-service practitioners in a practical way to do a better job in the present. Beyond such direct usefulness, knowledge about the founding of the nation, ideas of citizenship and democracy, and development of specific practices are central to the role public employees play in conveying knowledge of the governmental sector to the public. There are many examples of the importance of knowing about the past for interpretation of the present and actively shaping the future.

A PICTURE OF CHANGE

American public administration is set in a complex and fascinating environmental context of social, economic, and political systems. There are public employees who are not often affected by this context or trends and events in the broader society. They perform professional/technical tasks largely free from concerns about public opinion, adequacy of program funding, or their role in the process of creating public policy. But for many others, sound decision making depends on knowing about the nature of the environment and using that knowledge to improve their effectiveness.

At a general level, the times in which we live are sometimes called postmodern. The concept of postmodernism can be used in different ways, but for our purposes the key idea is the assertion that ideas about people and society that have been accepted as “real” for some time are coming apart, potentially leaving us “in a state of relativity reduced to normlessness and a conclusion that anything goes, because no one has a basis for claims to moral rectitude and obligation” (Cooper 2006, 46). From the Age of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century to the Industrial Age of the twentieth century, modern thinking has attempted to apply science and reason to solve the mysteries of human nature, the natural world, and social life, including the structure and operation of institutions and organizations.

Today, despite the success of the modernist paradigm in creating systems and technologies that have transformed society, questions are raised about the validity of the quest for certainty and objective truth. Evidence given in support of the idea that many people question the certainties of the past includes:

- *Diminishing trust in science and government.* Only a few decades ago, people tended to think most problems could be dealt with through rational methods and technology, and there was faith that government was a good way to improve social conditions. People were optimistic that government could eliminate enduring problems such as poverty, environmental abuses, inadequate education, and joblessness, but the complexities of social and economic systems have made these goals difficult to achieve, or even to clearly define. Though we still think that technology can create useful physical tools and solve concrete, natural-science problems such as curing disease, many no longer trust it to solve social problems, and government is often viewed as the servant of special interests rather than a means of addressing issues of public concern. People at one time may have believed there is a single objective “Truth” to guide the way, but that belief is less common today.
- *Social fragmentation.* The old certainties of East versus West and communism versus capitalism have changed into ethnic and tribal conflict in the context of the dominance of global capitalism. Within the United States, people identify to a lesser extent with traditional party affiliations or loyalty to institutions and are more interested in the expanding variety of

communities of interest available through technology and associations at the neighborhood and community level.

- *Vanishing norms.* Social fragmentation and greater choice bring with them uncertainty about the values that underlie morality and decisions about ethical conduct. A disturbing sense of relativism seems to be common, fed by images in popular culture of people whose values would have seemed outrageous and unacceptable in earlier times. There is less agreement on the nature of the family, what sort of education is best, which occupations are most desirable, the role of science and technology in human life, and so on. People with seemingly extreme views react to what they perceive as the threat of disintegration of moral control with proposals to impose their view of morality on others. The part of this agenda affecting the public sector involves limiting and prescribing actions of public-service practitioners such as school administrators and teachers, child-care workers, librarians, medical researchers, and so on.
- *Skepticism about authoritative answers.* Public skepticism toward unambiguous, single-answer explanations includes portrayals of history, institutions, and events (Rosenau 1992, chap. 4). The creation of the Constitution is a good example. It has become more common to encounter questions about these events, such as the morality of failing to eliminate slavery and grant citizenship status to women, and whether those favoring adoption of the new Constitution did so from a desire to promote individual liberty or to limit public access to a government run by a wealthy elite. Another example is debate about the role of women, since the Progressive Era in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in making the public sector more democratic and responsive to the needs of lower-income and disadvantaged people. Have women advocated a different view of the relationship of the public sector to the plight of individuals than have men (Frazer and Lacey 1993; Stivers 1993, 2000)? If we no longer believe there are clear and effective scientific answers to human problems, we are likely to question people with authority and expertise. For public administration, the consequence is dealing with a disillusioned and disinterested citizenry; some of those who remain involved examine and criticize administrative actions in detail.
- *Small and local is preferred to large and distant.* Given social fragmentation and skepticism about scientific solutions and those in authority, people naturally feel most comfortable with what is closest to them. This can mean paying less attention to the barrage of media coverage of national and international events, instead focusing on private, daily challenges associated with work and family. For some it can mean becoming more involved in local associations or community affairs.
- *The paradox of globalization.* Despite the preference for things that are closer and thus easier to understand and control, people worldwide are subject to the impacts of economic globalization. Globalization is the spread of the corporate businesses of developed Western countries across national boundaries, sometimes affecting local cultures in ways that people resist. It leads many to abandon traditional values and beliefs of their societies, in favor of a lifestyle of consumerism (Barber 1996).

This is quite a picture of change and uncertainty, of localized values, commitments, and action, including a shift from interest in “public things” to private interests and pursuits, and pressure to join a global economy. To many of us, it seems that culture, politics, and technology are radically different today from the way they were in the recent past and that the rate of change is accelerating. On the other hand, change, uncertainty, and questioning of commonly accepted values can be found at many points in history, along with periods of calm and stability.

HISTORICAL PECULIARITY

In some ways the past does seem peculiar, distinctive, not simply how the present would be if there were fewer people and less technology, but really different. A brief look at America during the founding era of the 1780s highlights some of the differences between that era and the present. At the time of the debate over the proposed United States Constitution, the nation was largely rural, most people were farmers, and government was mostly an insignificant and distant part of everyday life. Frederick Quinn (1993, 3) offers this description:

The long coastline was fair prey for foreign invaders. Roads were few, muddy when it rained, dusty otherwise. Transportation was slow and irregular, most dependable by water. The potentially prosperous, primarily agrarian economy was stagnant, owing to the recent eight-year war, and entrepreneurial people were not sure how it would improve. Scattered insurrections flared, and the prospect of angry mobs or unschooled peasants taking the law into their hands threatened whatever form of government the newly independent states selected. The central government was powerless, lacking authority to raise funds or an army, or to administer justice. Politicians debated at length whether the existing government should be patched up, or if there should be a strong president, a president and council with shared powers, or a legislature with most power vested in it; but the discussions went nowhere.

The confederation's thirteen isolated states were in infrequent contact with one another, except for commerce along the main maritime arteries. Spanish, French, English, and other metallic coins still circulated long after the war; the Continental Congress's money was valueless. "Not worth a continental" was a popular expression. The wartime military leader, George Washington, wrote state governors in 1783 that he feared "the union cannot be of long duration, and everything must very rapidly tend to anarchy and confusion." Thomas Jefferson, then Minister to France, said, "We are the lowest and most obscure of the whole diplomatic tribe." A British cleric said Americans were "a disunited people till the end of time, suspicious and distrustful to each other, they will be divided and subdivided into little commonwealths, or principalities."

When the Constitution was ratified and the new national government was formed in 1789, the thirteen states had a total population of approximately 4 million (roughly as many as today live in, for example, Kentucky, or South Carolina, or Colorado), spread out along the Atlantic coast. The size of all the land in the new United States was equivalent to the combined land area of France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Britain, and Ireland (Rossiter 1966, 24). Most people lived outside the larger cities, in "towns and settlements but just as many in isolation. Only twenty-four places had more than 2,500 inhabitants, only five cities had more than 10,000: Philadelphia (45,000), New York (33,000), Boston (18,000), Charleston (16,000), and Baltimore (13,500)" (Rossiter 1966, 25). This contrasted with the populations of European cities at the time, such as Paris (600,000 in the late eighteenth century, about 9 million today) or London (950,000 in the late eighteenth century, about 7 million today). Communication between Europe and America took weeks by boat and transportation in America was difficult, since "roads were bad, bridges few, ferries leaky, rivers whimsical, stagecoaches cranky, and inns ill-kept" (Rossiter 1966, 25). Incidents and delays due to these conditions could happen to anyone, as described by Leonard White:

On October 25, 1794, the President of the United States [George Washington] was returning from Bedford, Pennsylvania, to the seat of government. While crossing the Susquehanna

River, his coach became lodged between two boulders in midstream, and there he was forced to sit in the rain until it could be extricated. (1956, 1)

Several years earlier Washington had assumed office as the first president, in 1789, and the government consisted of: “a foreign office with John Jay and a couple of clerks to deal with correspondence from [ambassadors] John Adams in London and Thomas Jefferson in Paris . . . a Treasury Board with an empty treasury . . . a ‘Secretary at War’ with an authorized army of 840 men . . . a dozen clerks whose pay was in arrears, and an unknown but fearful burden of debt, almost no revenue, and a prostrate credit” (White 1956, 1).

To this picture of physical and governmental differences from contemporary society, we could add social and cultural differences. There was no general education in that era and only a relatively small number of people were familiar with the writings of European authors on politics and government. A number of leading figures in the Revolution and the new government, such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, were slaveholders. Active participation in the public affairs of the day, and citizenship rights such as voting, were limited to white male property owners. Attitudes toward citizenship and the relationship between classes of people were very different from those of today.

Despite these dramatic differences between the founding period and today, those in the founding generation with the knowledge and desire to do so were active in discussing matters that seem quite contemporary, such as keeping government from interfering in the lives of individuals and at the same time making it effective. It was their ideas of liberty and a government that would preserve order and simultaneously allow some sense of self-governance that we live with today, as citizens and as public service practitioners. Society, government, and interpretations of the Constitution have all changed significantly since the time of the nation’s founding. Thomas Jefferson (thought of as a leading theorist of American democracy), Alexander Hamilton (credited with laying the foundation for contemporary administrative systems), and James Madison (leading political theorist and guiding hand in creating the Constitution) would probably be surprised at what their creation has become.

HISTORICAL SIMILARITY

Though these founders might be surprised, they likely would find basic concerns of today to be similar to those of their own time, as contemporary Americans seek a balance between collective action through government and allowing as much space as possible for people to act outside the public sphere. Also, they might tell us that change and apparent disintegration of certainties in society are not unique to our time. An overarching theme of American thought in the formative period of the eighteenth century was the Age of Enlightenment desire to shed old constraints imposed by monarchical governments and religious beliefs, turning instead toward individual responsibility for reason and choice. One result was political thought that broke with tradition and created an experiment in governance that, though uncertain and risky at the time, has proven durable for many generations.

Through the nineteenth century, Americans worked to make their governments more democratic and they expanded the scope of government action. They also experimented with a variety of legal, institutional, and structural forms as they pursued democracy, self-interest, and efficiency. These things were often in conflict, as evidenced during the nineteenth century in heated political debate, violent confrontations in cities, war with England, and war between sections of the country. Another aspect of radical social transition was the phenomenon of people leaving home and safety

to migrate in long, dangerous journeys westward to places about which they knew little, creating new communities literally from the ground up.

By the latter part of the nineteenth century, America had entered the modern era and the Industrial Revolution, which brought two changes, among others, on a mass scale that would permanently change society. One was the movement of populations from rural to urban areas in search of jobs, a movement that brought with it transformation in the lives of individuals and families. The other was the shift in work, from individual responsibility for a workshop or farm, to large-scale employment in factories and huge organizations (Rodgers 1974). These changes caused considerable human suffering and despair, as the conditions of the working class were often terrible, including long work hours at repetitive and boring jobs, child labor, hazardous materials and processes in the workplace, and ruthless business owners (Zinn 1995, chap. 13). But there was an optimistic side to the time, a belief that history was moving forward to something better. Historian Samuel Eliot Morison wrote of the turn of the twentieth century:

Americans like myself who were so fortunate as to be born in the late nineteenth century and brought up in the early twentieth, often look upon the years prior to 1914 as a golden age of the Republic. In part, this feeling was due to our youth; in part to the fact that the great middle class could command goods and services that are now beyond their reach. But there was also a euphoria in the air, peace among the nations, and a feeling that justice and prosperity for all was attainable through good will and progressive legislation. (1965, 841)

This feeling of peace and prosperity could be attributed to the 1950s as well (though overshadowed somewhat by the Cold War). However, World War I, the Great Depression of the 1930s, and the periods directly before and after the 1950s (World War II in the 1940s and the countercultural revolution of the 1960s), were times of tremendous upheaval in personal and national life and the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of people in world wars.

Consider a writer whose perspective on social phenomena we might think of as characteristic of today's postmodern era. About people who wish for what they think of as the beauty of returning to an earlier time of certainty and order in life, he writes:

I don't see how this dream can succeed. Their solution is built on a wild impossibility, for in order to realize it they will have to abolish machinery and communication, newspapers and popular books. They will have to call upon some fairy to wipe out the memory of the last hundred years, and they will have to find a magician who can conjure up a church and a monarchy that men will obey. They can't do any of these things, though they can bewail the fact and display their grief by unremitting hostility to the modern world.

But though their remedy is, I believe, altogether academic, their diagnosis does locate the spiritual problem. We have lost authority. We are "emancipated" from an ordered world. We drift.

The loss of something outside ourselves which we can obey is a revolutionary break with our habits. Never before have we had to rely so completely upon ourselves. No guardian to think for us, no precedent to follow without question, no lawmaker above, only ordinary men set to deal with heart-breaking perplexity. All weakness comes to the surface. We are homeless in a jungle of machines and untamed powers that haunt and lure the imagination. (111–112)

The use of the male gender dates the piece to sometime before, maybe, the 1970s. However, this quotation is much older than that. It is taken from the book *Drift and Mastery*, by political writer

Walter Lippmann, originally published in 1914 (reprinted in 1985). The point is that a feeling of drift, of being cut loose from the certainties of the past, is not unique to the beginning of the twenty-first century. We could no doubt find a similar sense of the crumbling of moral and social certainties if we examined the thoughts of Europeans during the Black Plague in medieval times, people emigrating from Europe to the American colonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Jews and other minorities in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, Western pioneers in the United States in the nineteenth century, Americans during the 1960s who believed the counterculture and Vietnam War protests could mean the end of civilization as we know it, and so on. The specific uncertainties experienced by these people are not our uncertainties, but clearly many people have faced the breakdown of values and beliefs in ways that rival or exceed anything we know today. The important thing for our consideration of the societal environment of contemporary public administration is that these are indeed trying and uncertain times, but we in the present are not unique or alone in having such experiences.

CHANGE AND ECONOMICS

This longer view of history is one way to add some perspective to our thoughts about the current, supposedly postmodern era. There is another factor in the contemporary societal environment that runs counter to the postmodern view of fragmentation and loss of certainty. This is the globalization of economics and the spread of economic thinking in the social sciences, including public administration.

The United States is a *liberal-capitalist* society. The term liberal is not used here in the common twentieth-century sense of favoring large-scale income redistribution through social welfare programs, but rather in the sense in which it was used in the Age of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, into the nineteenth century. This use of liberal carries a concern for individual freedom from authority and has become associated with economic freedom to make profit and invest the capital in new or expanded business ventures (*capitalism*). Worldwide, existing economic and cultural systems have been affected by globalization of the products and techniques of Western capitalist societies, in some cases allowing improvements in living conditions and allowing greater freedom in life choices, in some cases causing environmental degradation or loss of cultural identity.

In the United States, public administration exists within the context of societal values in which individual freedom, including the freedom to make economic choices, is part of the cultural norm of emphasis on the individual. There has always been a countertrend in American culture toward limitation of extreme differences in income or ostentatious displays of wealth. In colonial and founding times, this trend toward equality of position was present in resistance to European-like titles of nobility and in the informality of relationships between people in different economic circumstances. Still, there was a wealthier economic class in the population and distinctions were made between people on this basis. With the coming of industrialization and the increasing urbanization of the nation in the later part of the nineteenth century, differences in wealth became even larger and more apparent. People with wealth often wielded political power as well, and the laws and institutions of the nation tended to protect this group against governmental action and demands from labor.

Today, American society is large and *pluralistic* (characterized by many groups with different interests), but there are also significant differences in wealth greater than those in many other fully developed nations, with the richest 1 percent of households owning almost 40 percent of the wealth, compared to 18 percent in Britain, for example (Bradsher 1995, A1, C4). In addition, the dominant American attitude toward the relationship of people to each other and to the broader community of

citizens is one of negative rights, that is, of protecting the individual from interference by others. In this environment, government is regarded primarily as a means of obtaining individual rights and protections and only secondarily as a forum for citizens to debate and enact measures that serve some broader public good. The public sector is valued to the extent it provides an orderly structure of regulation that allows business to function smoothly (this is called a *mixed economy*, in essence a balance, or tension, between the private and public sectors), but there is often serious resistance to attempts to expand the role of the public sector into substantive questions of human or environmental well-being (McCollough 1991, chap. 4).

Whatever our perceptions of the nature of contemporary society, we may be able to agree this is a time of rapid and significant change, coupled with citizen demands for efficient and effective public services and voice in governance. In addition, fewer and fewer people today are able to count on lifelong job certainty and the clear career path their parents could expect several decades ago. The rate and depth of change in the environment of organizations shapes the way they use human resources. Many workers today must cultivate marketable skills rather than a sense of loyalty to a particular organization. They are expected to “behave nimbly, to be open to change on short notice, to take risks continually, to become ever less dependent on regulations and formal procedures” (Sennett 1998, 9).

Richard Sennett (1998) calls this phenomenon “flexible capitalism.” He argues that workers in this environment develop a sense of confusion and anxiety and have trouble forming stable values or ideals. This sense of uncertainty has not yet affected the public sector to the extent it has the private and nonprofit sectors. In many parts of the private and nonprofit sectors, it has become the norm for managers to constantly scan their environment, seeking to adapt to a changing clientele and the initiatives of competitors. Marketing, image, and pleasing the customer are crucial. Though this model of turbulence and sensitivity to the environment has not yet affected the public sector as intensely as the private sector, it is nevertheless partially evident in many organizations and some have moved close to the private-sector model. In addition, because of the thrust to “run government like a business,” as evidenced in trends such as contracting out, privatization, downsizing, public-private partnerships, and so on, we may expect continued pressure for public agencies to function more like private firms.

The expansion of economic thought in the public sector, citizen demand for greater accountability from public employees, and citizen desire for greater control over the public-policy process all generate pressures to change the way we view the professional role in public service. In recent years, the way public bureaucracies operate has been questioned in at least three ways. In the first, public professionals would be more *entrepreneurial* in their methods, operating to maximize economic efficiency as do private-sector managers and staying away from policy making. This approach, which draws on the values of the private market, is found in *New Public Management*,¹ or NPM. Second, public professionals would assist citizens to participate in governance, facilitating processes of discussion and deliberation in which people arrive at decisions or recommendations on issues of public policy. Third, recognizing they function in complex governance *networks* that include public agencies, elected officials, nonprofit organizations, private firms, and citizens, public professionals would use ideas drawn from multiple schools of thought to address the values and preferences in play in a public-policy setting. This could include traditional attention to law and hierarchy, along with market-like techniques, citizen involvement, and collaborative relationships with several organizations and groups who have interests in the particular policy issue being discussed.

Each of these critiques of public bureaucracies is influenced by the economic and political context of society. Each includes some techniques and values that have always been part of

public administration, and each of them has affected the organization and function of public agencies. It will be fascinating to watch what happens in the future, how the focus on these ideas changes in response to changes in the environment of public administration.

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DEMOCRACY, CITIZENSHIP, AND GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE

There has been lively discussion in America for more than two hundred years about the relationship of people to their governments—national, state, and local. This involves questions about the freedom of people to act without interference from government, the duties of citizens, whether people are able to govern themselves, and tension between economic classes in society. Today we often think of these matters in the context of *democracy*, but during the Founding Era of the American government in the late 1700s, democracy was often thought to mean irrational mob rule. Instead of democracy, people in that era discussed *liberty*, *republicanism*, and *civic virtue* (Lakoff 1996, 26). Though they used words other than democracy, people during the Founding Era were, as we are today, interested in the extent to which citizens could determine for themselves the nature of the relationship between the individual and the larger society.

Today, we include many ideas and concerns within the broad definition of democracy. In situations where it is not explicitly the focus of attention, on closer examination it is found behind discussion of other issues. When Americans complain about high taxes, they may in part be saying they want more influence over how government uses their money. When they express concern about the size or intrusiveness of government, in part they may mean the public sector seems to be moving into so many areas of the lives of individuals that they feel squeezed, constrained. When they talk about unresponsive bureaucrats, government “experts” who do not listen to citizens, or nonsensical regulations, they are worrying that somehow democracy, whatever the word means to each individual, is being damaged.

The concept of democracy is not well defined in common usage, but it expresses a wish for individuals to be heard in, and to participate in decision making about, public matters if they choose to do so. It often carries with it meanings that might better be termed *freedom*—the unrestricted ability to think and act—and *liberty*—the greatest possible freedom consistent with respecting the rights of others and doing one’s duty toward the community. (A speaker in 1773 described liberty as “the happiness of living under laws of our own making” [in Wood 1969, 24].) Overall, democracy is often thought of as “the quest for autonomy” (Lakoff 1996).

A distinction may be drawn between *procedural democracy*, in which people have equal rights to participate in the economic and public life of society (this is the question of *equality of opportunity*), and *substantive democracy*, in which society considers to what extent it will allow inequalities of wealth, power, and privilege (this is the question of *equality of outcome, situation, or circumstances*). Democracy that involves elected officials making decisions for the people is called *representative democracy*, and a situation in which citizens personally participate in decision making is *direct democracy*.

DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

As society moves away from authoritarian rule by one person or a small group of people, there are a number of alternatives available in the relationship of the individual to society. The concept

of *citizenship* is central to understanding democracy because it provides perspectives on relationships between citizens, elected officials, and public employees.

Of the interesting aspects of democratic citizenship, we may highlight three that are useful here. One is whether the emphasis of a particular model of citizenship is placed on the community as a collective social group or on the individual. If the former, the interests of society are favored over those of the individual and citizens think of themselves as contributing parts of the whole, acting for the benefit of all. If the latter, there is much individual independence from the collective group, the interests of the individual are favored, and citizens think of themselves as autonomous, protected from the influence of society and free to act for their own benefit. Another aspect of citizenship is the level of commitment to procedural equality, that is, on giving each citizen full and equal access to the rights and responsibilities that accompany participating in public life. The third useful aspect of citizenship is the extent of commitment to substantive equality, that is, on ensuring that each citizen has adequate housing, food, education, career opportunities, health care, and so on, and that differences in wealth and power between people are not so great there are separate classes of people far removed from one another and inclined to treat some better than others.

The *classical republican* model of citizenship favors society over the individual. The term *republican* is used not in reference to a political party, but to a form of governing in which citizens believe that “ultimate authority is rooted in the community at large” and virtuous citizens demonstrate love of country, readiness to serve, preference for the public good over personal advantage, and belief that citizens achieve “moral fulfillment by participating in a self-governing republic” (Phillips 1993, 24). This model of citizenship has the virtue of fostering a sense of community and selfless service to a greater good. It has the disadvantage of emphasizing conformance to a particular sort of community and tends to exclude from full citizenship people who have backgrounds or beliefs different from those who are defined as citizens. In part, this exclusion comes from concern that broad, direct participation in public affairs may mean mob rule or the tyranny of the majority.

The *classical liberal* model of citizenship favors individual autonomy. As noted in Chapter 1, the term *liberal* is used here in the way it was meant from the Age of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century until the mid-twentieth century, that is, freedom of the individual from the dictates of church and state, allowing each person to decide for themselves their beliefs and interests. (Note that use of the word *classical* does not necessarily mean a particular practice has disappeared, but is intended to avoid confusion with other, more recent uses of terms.) The strength of the model is the clarity of its vision of the individual as the center of thought and action, countering claims of institutions, the powerful, and tradition to restrict personal liberty. It has the disadvantage of potential concentrations of wealth and power that restrict public access to procedural and substantive democracy. The assumption that the public sector should stay out of private matters (as defined by those with the greatest stake in the status quo) means that many citizens must deal with powerful people and corporations on their own. Concepts of the classical liberal model were expressed by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence, as he wrote of the individual’s right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” The founding generation read European authors on matters of history, philosophy, and politics. Jefferson’s phrase was borrowed from English philosopher John Locke (1632–1704), who believed that each person was born with “natural rights,” including life, liberty, and property.

The classical liberal and classical republican models of citizenship are the two most commonly discussed in the literature of the American public sphere and the relationship of citizens to government. However, there are likely several other models that could be useful for understanding the full range of options open in crafting democratic citizenship. One in particular we may call the *radical*