

LARGE FORCES

WHAT'S MISSING IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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THREE CLAIMS

- The boundaries of scholarship in PA have shrunk since the field's early years
- Conventional wisdom about the intellectual history of the field blinds us to shrinking of boundaries
- This change has contributed to a decline in relevance and prominence the field

HOW THE BOUNDARIES HAVE SHRUNK

- Today, the field of PA is defined narrowly:
 - "public organization behavior, public management, and public policy implementation" (Frederickson et al)
 - "the use of managerial, political, and legal theories and processes to fulfill legislative, executive, and judicial mandates for the provision of governmental regulatory and service functions" (Rosenbloom et al)
- What is not included:
 - research on the subject of administrative development
 - shift in roles and structures of administration over time
 - That recognizes large forces as key explanatory factors
 - changes in international relations; economy; technology; demography; disease; climate; culture

ORIGINAL BOUNDARIES OF THE FIELD

- "The study of public administration [must extend] to the varying **historical, sociological, economic, and other conditioning factors** that give public administration its peculiar stamp in each country."
 - Robert Dahl, 1947
- "Environmental change is linked with public administration. . . . **There is an explanation of the functions of government in the changes which take place in its environment**, changes which coerce us into the use of government as an instrument of public housekeeping and adjustment."
 - John Gaus, 1945

LARGE FORCES REASONING

- "Administrative developments, like organic developments, cannot be understood unless they are related to their own organic past and to **the compulsions of the environment in which they exist.**"
 - Luther Gulick, 1948
- Administrative systems are "shaped by environment in which it has to operate . . . **Changes in the environment bring about alterations in the public service.**"
 - J.E. Hodgetts, 1964

LARGE FORCES REASONING



- White: **administrative** systems evolve in response to "the influence of external forces"
- Leaders are "frustrated by circumstances," "coerced by events"
- Bancroft Prize 1955
- Pulitzer Prize 1959

RE-WRITING PA'S INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

- Today's conventional wisdom:
 - Pre-war emphasis on developing scientific "principles of administration"
 - Gulick is among strongest defenders of "pre-war orthodoxy"
 - no significant advances in PA theory during the war
 - Waldo and Simon (*Primer*: "giants of the field") launch a era of "dissent and heterodoxy" in 1947-1948

THE MESS WE'RE IN

- Key texts:
 - *Formally* define the boundaries of the field narrowly
 - Rewrite intellectual history to conform to narrow definition
- But PA scholars still engage in *informal* forms of large forces reasoning
 - to meet the needs of student readers
 - brief passages provide "historical context"
 - These informal efforts are done quickly and poorly
- Larger questions picked up by APD, a sub-field of political science
 - Concern for interplay of "environmental factors" and "institutional structures" (Krasner, 1984)
 - Ira Katznelson, 2013: White is "great-grandfather" of APD

WHY OLD BOUNDARIES SHOULD BE RESTORED

- Inability to explain where PA has been, and where it is going
- Or provide advice to other countries on processes of administrative development
- Limitations of scholarship in APD
 - Weaknesses of institutionalist framework
- Retreat from big questions contributes to the declining profile of public administration since 1940s
 - Decline in news coverage
 - Negligible presence in trade press
 - Shifts in status relative to political science