

Matthew Holden, Jr.

# Continuity & Disruption

---

---

ESSAYS IN PUBLIC  
ADMINISTRATION



# Continuity AND Disruption

---

---

ESSAYS IN  
PUBLIC  
ADMINISTRATION

Matthew Holden, Jr.

University of Pittsburgh Press

Published by the University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, Pa., 15260

Copyright © 1996, University of Pittsburgh Press

All rights reserved.

Manufactured in the United States of America

Printed on acid-free paper

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Holden, Matthew, 1931—

Continuity and disruption : essays in public administration / Matthew Holden.

p. cm. — (Pitt series in policy and institutional studies)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8229-3885-5 (cl. : alk. paper)

1. Public administration. I. Title. II. Series.

JF1351.H65 1995

350—dc20 95-16081

A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.  
Eurospan, London

## **Continuity and Disruption**

**PITT SERIES IN POLICY AND  
INSTITUTIONAL STUDIES**

Bert A. Rockman, Editor

To  
the love of my wife  
and the continuity of our several families:

Holden / Welch

Garvin / Howard

Clark / Kennedy

Spinks

---

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

These essays result from the Ransone Lectures that I was invited to give at the University of Alabama in 1987. In the intervening years, my wife, Dorothy Holden, has been an ever present help and source of encouragement. Victor Gibean, who acted as my official host at the University of Alabama, was unusual in his intellectual interest in the subject, as well as in collegial courtesy, at the time of the visit. Harvey Kline, who was department chair at the time, was kind to show interest in this material well outside his field of comparative politics. Mylon Winn and Stephen Percy enhanced my understanding of what colleagues who have entered the discipline since 1980, more or less, perceive about the history and foundations of the discipline. Terrence Harwick helped with my understanding of Mary Parker Follett. Donald F. Kettl contributed greatly, as our discussions ranged over many issues of administration, and David O'Brien perceptively commented on the issues of law and administration. Martha Derthick was most helpful in her response to the chapter on public administration and the plural society.

James A. (Dolph) Norton, then director of the Center for Public Service, University of Virginia, gave me the equivalent of a subsidy by allowing me virtually unrestricted use of the offices and equipment of the Center. Frances H. Granger, executive assistant to the director of the Center, and Gail H. Moore, Faculty of Arts and Sciences Word Processing Center, along with their respective clerical staffs, were equally helpful. Sandra Wiley was a helpful adviser; and Lisa A. Miller, Kirsten Nakjavani, and Susan MacDonald read copy, looked up citations, and handled extensive word processing and other logistical tasks. Morgan Emily Adams worked without complaint through all the minutiae in finishing the job. I gladly accept the obligation to extend public thanks to them all.

## **Continuity and Disruption**



---

---

## CONTENTS

*Acknowledgments* ix

Introduction 1

### Part I Intellectual History

- 1 The “Accumulated Wealth of Concepts, Questions, and Generalizations” 13
- 2 Why and How Political Science Surrendered the Study of Public Administration 43

### Part II Dogma and Controversy

- 3 The Dogma and Theory of Executive Leadership: Brownlow, the Judges, and Operating Administration 77
- 4 Dogma, Interests, and Administrative Law as Politics, I 107
- 5 Dogma, Interests, and Administrative Law as Politics, II 137

### Part III External Sources of Disruption

- 6 Politics, Technology, and Administrative History: A Tribute to Leonard D. White 171
- 7 Politics, Technology, and Administrative History: A Tribute to John Merriman Gaus 189
- 8 Public Administration and the Plural Society 208

Epilogue 249

*Notes* 259

*Index* 287

---

## INTRODUCTION

Walter de la Mare wrote a poem in which these lines appear:

Thou hast come, by some dark, dark catastrophe  
Far, far from home.

These lines seemed remarkably appropriate to someone transformed in six months from being a political science graduate student in Evanston, Illinois, to being an army private in the replacement depot in Inchon, South Korea. These words, copied into a little notebook, soon settled into memory.

*Similarly, public administration, as taught in American universities, also shows signs of having come far from home.* There is much useful information conveyed in the hot topical issues discussed in journals, in academic courses oriented to practice, and in the more abstract exercises presented in other courses. But the field of public administration as a whole seems little guided by a sense of the fundamental problems from which its inquiries and teachings derive. Igor Diakanoff, an Assyriologist, is quoted as saying: “Man is always man in any age.”<sup>1</sup> If one believes this to be true over the long periods that an Assyriologist studies, it is also true over the short period of recent decades.

Hence, the subject of the following chapters—the fundamental problem—is derived from a comment made by Albert B. Martin. Martin said that one of the central problems of the administrator is to reduce turbulence in the operating environment of administration.<sup>2</sup> Turbulence arises in the continual exchange between continuity and disruption. Understandably, continuity is the goal in administration, and sometimes it is achieved. Yet disruption is recurrent, whether in a repressive dictatorship experiencing popular unrest or

in a social democracy of pacifist inclinations faced with a tough insurrection. The interplay between continuity and disruption—turbulence—is my subject.

The underlying thesis of this work is that administration is central to politics. There is a permanence to politics, even when people profess to dislike politics or to act without politics. Groups are necessarily diverse, and the needs or interests of a group's members will vary. This is true for families or clans, churches or clubs, corporations or universities, and so it is for governments. There must be some process for expressing differences, bringing differences into controlled conflict, and bringing conflicts to some resolution. *Politics* is the name of that process, whether formally recognized or furtively practiced, whether expressed in overt ideologies, doctrines, professions of religious faith, or even raw egoism. Politics involves, preeminently, making decisions where there is no necessary or overriding criterion that logically and psychologically causes the contending parties to reach agreement. Politics may thus amount to making decisions about incommensurate elements.

Politics, in brief, is the process of organizing power within human groups, large and small, public and private. To organize power means to control or to seek to control. By extension, it also includes those who seek to reject control, or even any association with existing powers and principalities. Thus engagement with politics is first a factual matter, not a question of values or states of mind and loyalty.

If one takes this view, then any attempt to maintain a false dichotomy between politics and administration, whether in old forms or new, impoverishes our understanding of public administration. Even more decisive from the viewpoint of political science is that such a dichotomy impoverishes our understanding of politics. It obscures the essential proposition that administration is the central process in politics.<sup>3</sup> Administration cannot be separated from politics, and no political system can be sustained when its administrative core collapses.

Administration is the imperative process of diffusing into the body politic whatever choices have been deemed compelling by those who purport to hold authority at the center. It entails discretion about the actual use (not the mere pronouncement of rules and norms) of information, money, and force—the basic resources of power. Diffusion does not, of course, stand alone, for its obverse is aggregation.

Public administration necessarily involves the public.<sup>4</sup> If a political system is to be viable, some process must aggregate and bring to the center the various bits of information (demands, protests, manifestations of loyalty)

expressed by the body politic. In simple, face-to-face political units, there is little need for formality. Aggregation is exemplified in the New England town meeting, for example. Various East African peoples once had communal gatherings called *barazas*. In the Arab world, there was a gathering called a *majlis*. Parliaments of various kinds have arisen when delegates, deputies, or representatives assemble to aggregate the diversity of wills and interests found in a body politic. Aggregation is, however, rendered nugatory without some means of diffusion. Legislatures can order armies to disband, but armies do not obey unless soldiers have internalized the belief that they should obey or unless they are compelled by other force. On the other hand, armies can actually control or disband legislatures if they choose, as when Oliver Cromwell marched his troops into the House of Commons.

Administration is not the only diffusion process; adjudication is also diffusionary. The difference is that the judicial process lacks the means to carry out its choices. A judge may pronounce that someone is to be evicted or executed, but it is the sheriff, or the prison warden, who ensures that the act is performed. Adjudication is a form of diffusion in the trial courts of urban America, where many routine decisions are made repeatedly. They are settings of mass justice, to borrow a term from Judge Henry Friendly.<sup>5</sup> Judges dealing with “mass justice” pay some attention to rights, but they also pay substantial attention to policies and preferred outcomes, whether in the public interest or some highly particular private interest. Decisions are not tailor-made. The careful attention to facts and circumstances associated with the ideal court trial are given short shrift. The judge in a housing court, as reported by Jones, who deals constantly with inspection reports,<sup>6</sup> is engaged in adjudication; this is in a sense quite different from the judicial process at the appellate level. Similarly, the judge in a lower criminal court has decisions structured as much by the availability of clerks to process cases, or by space in the jails to receive potential prisoners, as by abstract justice. These judges act remarkably like routine field administrators in government agencies; and like those field administrators, they constitute the witness of authority to people who, in Austin Ranney’s words, “almost never see anyone or have dealings with anyone other than ‘administrators.’”<sup>7</sup>

Administrative government is normal in human society, although I do not use *normal* in the common usage that contrasts *normal* to *abnormal*. I use *normal* in the statistical sense. Among the variety of political units, other than very small face-to-face representative groups, administrative government is inevitably necessary. Conversely, one expects to find that the loss of control

over actual use of force, money, and information is equivalent to the loss of power. A large-scale quantitative comparison of various types of governments would show this to be the case.

History also helps by multiplying the number of ways one can test these hypotheses. Dwight Waldo urges scholars to pay more attention to “the Roman experience of government and its consequences for the contemporary world.” The methodological force of Waldo’s admonition is powerful, though the Romans were latecomers on the scene. Records of government institutions go back to 3,000–4,000 B.C.<sup>8</sup> Mesopotamia, with its complex bureaucratic structure, existed 2,000 years before the Romans began to extend their power beyond the Italian peninsula.<sup>9</sup> The Hindu kingdom of Maurya predated Alexander’s fourth-century B.C. march into Asia and long survived it. Certain features of Maurya’s financial administration and management control seem familiar today. The king was advised to be “ever wakeful,” to set aside regular times to hear his subordinates, to oversee funds received and spent, and to receive gold. The Mauryan kingdom attempted to forecast revenues, attempted to control expenditures, drafted formal budgets with fixed allocations of expenses for important purposes, rewarded subordinates who saved the king money, penalized those who lost him money, and had auditing and surveillance systems to detect error or fraud.<sup>10</sup>

During Maurya’s time, the Romans still had not gained control over Egypt, something they achieved only in the first century B.C.<sup>11</sup> Rome learned bureaucracy from Egypt, which had the world’s largest administrative structure for at least 1,400 years.<sup>12</sup> Initially, the Romans sought to control Egypt without annexing it; they could not hope to match the Egyptians’ administrative skills: “The senatorial proconsuls of the [Roman] Republic lacked the expertise to manage a complex bureaucratic system, and without it the agricultural and commercial wealth of Egypt would never be drawn effectively into the public treasury.” When, in due course, Augustus decided there was no choice but to annex Egypt, “he created cadres of Roman officials out of professional army officers, military tribunes and former leading centurions, trained in the practical operation of the Roman legionary establishment, who were capable of managing the departments of the Egyptian administration, manned by Greek personnel.”<sup>13</sup>

The Roman administrative format was spread throughout Western Europe by the Roman Catholic church, which adapted the imperial structure for ecclesiastical government. Because that structure reveals itself in modern secular governments, Rome’s experience is part of our own cultural tradition and continues to interest historians and researchers.<sup>14</sup>

We know much less about other past cultures, such as the African kingdoms and empires that existed before colonization of the continent.<sup>15</sup> Max Weber knew enough about them to say, “The numerous great Negro empires, and similar formations, have had only an ephemeral existence primarily because they lacked an apparatus of officials.” Weber cites these units to make the point that not “every historically known and genuine formation of great states has brought about a bureaucratic administration.”<sup>16</sup> The fact that they were not bureaucratic does not mean that they were not administered, however. Such entities could not have functioned without their administrative processes, and it would be valuable to have studies of them that approximate the level of detail found in analyses of Rome’s political structure, but that appears impossible given the paucity of information about the African states.<sup>17</sup> The polities of Central and South America before the European conquest, and political units created by Pacific Ocean cultures, would be similarly relevant, if only we knew more about them.

The view that this wide array of cases should show that administration is the central political process deviates from a dominant intellectual mode. Both academic literature and practical action show a persistent effort to ignore the connection between politics and public administration. For the past hundred years, students of public administration have often failed to see the control problem or have sought to avoid it. Evidence for this lies in the alleged distinction between political decisions and administrative decisions.

For at least fifty years, the terms *policy* and *managerial* have sometimes been substituted for *political* and *administrative*. The presumption is that political (or policy) decisions precede, and are qualitatively different from, administrative (or managerial) decisions, which deal with implementation. The idea is that these are two separate activities, distinguishable in concept and in fact, involving different decisional criteria, skills, and personnel. The substitution of terms changes little or nothing. *Political*, as the word is used in this book refers to the nature of a relationship or action. It does not mean the kind of office from which action is taken. The old idea that the two activities—politics and administration—should be separate is designed to create institutions, situations, or processes in which control can be exercised without requiring those who oversee these entities to compete for their positions. It means that those who are “in charge” for “administrative” purposes are *in charge*. Their decisions are not subject to controversy on “irrelevant” grounds or to intervention from “politicians.”

By the 1980s, the “dichotomy” idea was rejected by many political scientists, though not necessarily by most other scholars in administrative studies.

Paul Appleby, Frederick C. Mosher, and others who established policy execution as a part of the concept of administration contributed to a useful innovation. On the basis of their thinking in particular, it has become common to define administration as the execution of public policy. This definition is serviceable, but it traps its users in the mental habits of political scientists who are heirs to the New Deal modifications of U.S. constitutional democracy. Moreover, the definition more or less assumes the United States as we know it in its contemporary federal structure.

But the definition does not guide us to the key forms of action or the sources of power. Administration is not necessarily modern or rationalistic. In many polities decisions are made on much narrower, more particularistic, grounds than the contemporary idea of policy would imply. Public revenue may be treated as a source of the private income of the ruler and the ruler's allies, and the amount of taxation levied may be as much as tax collectors can get. The police may be at liberty to use their arms, clubs, or whips not only for "professional" reasons but to satisfy their own egos, to exact revenge, or to coerce recalcitrant people. Information may be disseminated to those whom the officials want to have it and withheld from all others. These only illustrate the fact that the idea of *policy*, as taught in modern graduate schools, could be sheer absurdity and have no meaning whatsoever in some polities. But these examples are just as much administrative situations or power situations as any characterized in contemporary social science.

There are strong (and perverse) reasons to avoid mixing politics with the study of administration; one is intellectual and the other profoundly emotional. The purely intellectual reason to avoid mixing the study of politics with the study of administration is a desire for efficiency. Scholars do not wish to waste their time. Politics is hard to grasp, beyond a certain basic, obvious level. Political knowledge, as distinct from opinion and prejudice, is still extraordinarily primitive. The difficulty of achieving political knowledge is well known to political scientists. Their workaday world contains an array of apparently cogent but contradictory hypotheses.

Experience is valuable and often superior to the kind of learning that people acquire in colleges and universities.<sup>18</sup> Yet even experienced people in high positions, whether public or private, show the limits of what they have learned both in their actions and in their recitations. In their memoirs or oral histories of their public careers, men and women of experience, wittingly or unwittingly, focus on their own mental states. They offer reasons, rationales, and rationalizations for their actions or the actions of others. Moreover, on the basis of their sophisticated choice of strategies, it is frequently impossible

to distinguish those who lose from those who win. That is why, in recapitulating their actions, they are likely to emphasize intangibles like luck or timing. Official memoirs or oral histories are not very informative about what strategy works and why it works, although they may tell much about the actions of particular persons. Seldom do their explanations exhibit internal power and coherence.

If one seeking to understand public administration must have an equivalent to the *Physician's Desk Reference*, then political science is not what is required. Those with such a need often prefer to learn something that can be reduced to an elegant and powerful formula. Once learned, the applicability of such formulas to politics is not obvious in specific situations. School-taught political science and experiential learning thus find competitors in organizational theory, administrative science, and management science (see chapter 2).

People might wish to avoid politics not merely because it is difficult to understand but because many find the subject disturbing. The fear is not that they will fail to understand; it is that they will comprehend and find what they comprehend deeply objectionable. "Politics," it is often said in American folklore, "is a dirty business." If the folklore exaggerates, politics nonetheless can be conceived, in Reinhold Niebuhr's terms, as morally ambiguous, never wholly good. As Hannah Pitkin says, politics attracts but it also repels.<sup>19</sup> Knowledge of politics is for many people the forbidden fruit, possession of which touches the psyche in important ways that we want to avoid. If one must be sure that one's actions are more likely to have good, just, or rational results than to be distorted or contradictory, then politics is also to be avoided.

Paradoxically, many people who are interested in politics avoid knowledge of administration for the same kind of reason. The politics they seek is not that just mentioned, but a more idealized kind. As an ideal, politics entails reasoned discourse among people who share values, moral language, and capacity for action, and who prefer to see each other as members of the same community. Public administration inevitably reveals strains and conflicts, and it raises (at best) morally ambiguous questions. Whose shops will actually be displaced to allow new construction? Whose money will actually be transferred to whom? Who will be water-hosed in the next five minutes if the blocked courthouse door is not allowed to open? Whose application to see a file will be denied then and there? These are the operational details that characterize the administration of public decisions, and they fall within the program and policy frameworks with which public administration is necessarily associated.

However, the efficient use of intellectual resources is only a partial reason



why many people avoid the study of politics. To reject the interdependence of politics and administration is analogous to chemists denying oxygen and believing in phlogiston. For students of politics to avoid the study of administration, and for students of administration with other backgrounds to avoid studying politics, yields empirically defective results. It systematically deflects attention from shifts in the actual use of force, money, and information. Wherever parties-at-interest make conflicting claims over the right and ability to control or influence actual-use decisions, there turbulence occurs.

Turbulence comes into play when we speak of information as a social resource. Information includes not only sheer facts but also the communication of values. It also entails the use of those facts—filtered through values—as a basis for decisions. Information is both factual and symbolic. Information may be conveyed as a product to be absorbed and used as the receiver permits. Information about the population counted by the census might be regarded as a simple factual matter, but it easily becomes symbolic (see chapter 7). Indeed, a vast proportion of information is intended to arouse emotions that sustain or undermine someone's power to control. This is a source of very great turbulence.

Turbulence is more visible in decisions about the actual use of money. It is most readily manifested, logically, where the largest sums are spent. In the contemporary United States government, this is chiefly in procurement, especially for the Department of Defense, and in the grant and subsidy programs for the civilian sector. In recent times, there can hardly be a country in the world without some analogous experience.

In virtually all nations, turbulence manifests itself in controversies about the use of force to defend and sustain the existing elites. It is easy for political scientists to conceive this in collective terms, such as a ruling social class or some other defined group. Rebellions are part of our thinking. But for much of the world, perhaps most of it, the corollary is that turbulence is expressed in dangers to, and defenses of, the persons of the incumbents of the moment. The inability of the administrative system to perform at this level is indicated when a head of state is assassinated, as in the cases of Egypt's President Anwar Sadat or India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The French administrative system evidently performed very well against the many attempts made on the life of President Charles de Gaulle between 1958 and 1968. Unlike Sadat and Gandhi, de Gaulle lived out his time in retirement and died the natural death of an old man.

On the whole, in today's constitutional democracies, force for elite protection is almost a nonissue, compared to many countries in the Third World.