GEORGE J. GORDON

# PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN AMERICA

## THIRD EDITION

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**George J. Gordon**
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**DEDICATED**
**TO THE MEMORY OF**
**ROSCOE C. MARTIN**
**AND**
**BERYL B. GORDON**

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# Preface

This book is designed as a basic, comprehensive text for use in public administration courses. It is *basic* in the sense that the reader is assumed to have some background knowledge of government and politics in the United States, but not necessarily specific information about administrative politics or managing government bureaucracies. Consequently, terms and concepts are defined and explained as they are introduced throughout the text, and key linkages among different dimensions of the subject are identified and discussed. It is *comprehensive* in that it provides coverage of subjects most public administration textbooks include—such as decision making, budgetary processes, and organization theory—and also of some areas not always discussed in other books, such as federalism and intergovernmental relations, government regulation, and administrative leadership.

The book has three principal emphases. The first is on the central importance of public administration in modern government. With literally thousands of separate public programs at all governmental levels, and hundreds of billions of dollars spent each year in managing them, the scope of administrative operations is immense. (That scope also has changed somewhat in recent years, as America's citizens consider basic questions about the appropriate place and influence of government in our lives.) The second emphasis is on the role and impact of politics in shaping public bureaucracies. Government agencies are affected by political currents and decisions, and students should be aware of the many ways in which political interests and administrative activities are intertwined. This book takes the position that it is not necessarily wrong or harmful that politics plays such a prominent role. The discussion of politics is explanatory rather than moralistic; "pros" and "cons" of issues such as government regulation are carefully examined, and the reader is encouraged to draw independent conclusions. The third emphasis is on management aspects of public administration, on concerns relating to the operation of public programs, from the perspective of the public agency manager. Among such concerns are communication and coordination, program planning, collective bargaining with public employees, and dealing with the phenomenon of "fiscal stress" which confronts more and more governments and agencies.

Much has changed in all these respects since the second edition of this text was published in 1982. I have tried to reflect the scope and possible consequences of developments in the past four years. At the same time I have sought to lay out clearly the links between the recent and more distant past, and to identify major currents and trends that will command our attention in the immediate future. Not least among these is the broad impact

of changes in the role of government resulting from a host of initiatives undertaken by the Reagan administration.

I am indebted to many individuals who contributed to the preparation of this edition. Valuable research assistance was furnished by Debra Holzhauer, Justine Schlund, Victoria Soderberg, and Vikki Wulf. Staff members at Milner Library, Illinois State University, provided generous assistance in finding relevant materials; especially helpful were Marian Carroll, Garold Cole, and Joan Winters. Faculty colleagues at Illinois State University provided useful information and insights, and stimulated my own thinking. These included Thomas Eimermann, Ann Elder, Richard Hartwig, George Kiser, Gary Klass, Alan Monroe, Nancy Lind, Richard Payne, and Frederick Roberts. Hibbert Roberts, chairman of the political science department, again strongly encouraged me in this enterprise; this book bears his imprint in more ways than one.

Still others were generous with time, energy, and information in my behalf. National government officials, past and present, include Alan Campbell, director of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) during the Carter administration; Ann Brazzier, Patrick Korten, Andrea Sheldon, and Edward Shell of OPM; Cynthia Cates Colella and Albert Richter, both formerly with the U.S. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR); and Alan V. Stevens of the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Others deserving of acknowledgment include Irene Fraser of the American Hospital Association, Chicago; and Ellen Holroyd of the State of Illinois Library in Springfield, Illinois. The reviewers commissioned by St. Martin's Press—Walter F. Baber of the University of Nevada at Reno, Donald F. Kettl of the University of Virginia, and Douglas H. Shumavon of Miami University (Ohio)—were uniformly helpful in their critiques; Michael Weber, Peter Dougherty, Sarah Rosenthal, Anne McCoy, and Faye Zucker of St. Martin's Press also greatly facilitated my efforts. My wife Myra, and our children Daniel and Rachel, were endlessly patient and supportive, and I am grateful. These individuals richly deserve much of the credit for whatever strengths are present in the book; mine alone is the responsibility for its weaknesses.

George J. Gordon
*Normal, Illinois*
*1986*

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## TO THE STUDENT

This text will help you enlarge your knowledge and understanding of what public administration is all about. Several features of the book will aid you in your studies. Chapter summaries present concise restatements of key points covered in the chapters. Notes are grouped at the end of each chapter; an effort has been made to furnish extensive source references in the hope you will become familiar with the literature in this field. Suggested readings at the end of each chapter list important sources for further research and information. Finally, a glossary of terms at the end of the book will help you review key concepts, techniques, laws, and institutions pertaining to public administration.

G.J.G.

# Contents

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# PART ONE

# Introduction

This opening section explores essential facts and concepts in public administration. In chapter 1, and throughout the book, the emphasis is on the political setting of public administration and the impact of politics on administrative decisions. We first will describe the most common structural arrangements of executive branch agencies. We will discuss the growth of government generally, and public administration in particular. We will explore similarities and differences between public and private administration, taking note of some ways in which they overlap in practice. We then will examine public administration as a field of study, especially its evolution from a relatively uncomplicated field in the early 1900s to the complex and unsettled discipline it is today.

In chapter 2 we will explore the setting in which public administration operates. We will consider traditional conceptions of how public bureaucracy ought to function and then compare them with the broad realities of American governmental bureaucracy, and we will discuss why the differences are important. We also will examine the underlying values in American administrative practice. Of central importance are the tensions between *political* values—such as individual liberty, representation, and popular control—and *administrative* values—such as bureaucratic efficiency, economy, and political neutrality. In addition, we will analyze the impact of social change and controversy on our values.

# 1

# Approaching the Study of Public Administration

PUBLIC administration in America today is a large enterprise encompassing the daily activities of literally millions of government workers, at all levels, and touching the daily life of virtually every American. The growth of government activity and public bureaucracy is one of the most significant social phenomena of recent decades. It has become the subject of considerable discussion among scholars and practitioners. At the same time, politicians of every stripe have criticized the bureaucracy—Jimmy Carter promised in 1976 to "clean up the horrible bureaucratic mess in Washington"; in 1980 Ronald Reagan promised to "get the federal government off your backs." Alabama Governor George Wallace put it more directly during the 1960s, chiding "pointy-headed bureaucrats who don't carry nothin' in those briefcases of theirs except their sack lunch!" Many other politicians have run, with some success, "against" the bureaucracy.[1] The "taxpayers' revolt," which surfaced swiftly and intensely in the late 1970s, is in part a reaction against perceived bureaucratic excesses. It has even been suggested that the language of bureaucracy (its jargon) has harmed the English language as a whole.[2] In one way or another, most of us are familiar with government bureaucracy.

Our consciousness of bureaucracy varies with the situation. We are aware of it when we fill out our income tax return (especially when we pay additional tax on April 15!), apply for a government loan to finance our college education, hear a television news story on the latest controversy in Congress over actions of the Federal Trade Commission, or deal directly with that most visible of public administrators, a police officer.

We are less conscious of the role of bureaucracy under other circumstances. Much bureaucratic decision making is obscure or just not directly meaningful to us. For an example of hidden bureaucratic decision making, consider the procedures followed by President John F. Kennedy and his ad-

visers in resolving the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. These included covert photographic flights over Cuba and secret messengers carrying notes back and forth to Soviet diplomats. For an example of bureaucratic decisions not directly meaningful to us, consider the testing procedures used by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for determining the purity of food additives or the effectiveness of a new drug. While such routine procedures may be important in individual instances, they generate little publicity or public attention.

Whatever our awareness of particular bureaucratic activities or decisions, the institution of bureaucracy evokes strong feelings among millions of Americans. A frequent response to any mention of "the bureaucracy" is negative; bureaucrats are unpopular with many of those they serve. Bureaucracy has become a favorite scapegoat for many of society's current ills. There are several reasons for this: government agencies are clearly influential; we don't elect our bureaucrats (in any but a handful of cases); and they are convenient, increasingly visible targets. We hear a great deal about the growing power of bureaucracy and bureaucrats, the arbitrary nature of many decisions, the lack of accountability, impersonal treatment, and cases of simple incompetence.

All in all, the public's regard for public administrators is at a low ebb, far below what it was forty or fifty years ago. First in the Great Depression of the 1930s, then during and after World War II, public administrators and their organizations enjoyed far greater public confidence than they do today. The general public, through their elected officials, looked to the administrative apparatus of government to take on increasing responsibility. Congress, state legislatures, city councils, mayors, governors, and presidents alike delegated growing amounts of discretionary power to administrative officials, in effect directing them to make the day-to-day choices involved in applying laws. No national referendum was held on the question: "Shall bureaucrats be given more responsibility?" But public acceptance of greater governmental involvement in a wider range of societal activities outweighed opposition to growth of government generally, and government bureaucracy in particular. Indeed, once bureaucratic involvement in national policy making began to increase, heightened public demand for government services ensured continuation of greater administrative activity, at least until the late 1970s and the 1980s (see Table 1-1).

Thus, the trends of growth begun during Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and consolidated under Harry Truman and, significantly, under Dwight Eisenhower's Republican administration, rested on a foundation of popular support and legitimacy that now, clearly, has eroded. This weakening of support seems to have developed as a reaction against particular governmental behavior—enforcement of civil rights laws, the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandals—and against a government widely viewed as becoming too distant from the people in terms of accountability, too close in terms of influence over private lives, and inept and wasteful, if not self-serving and corrupt.

**Table 1-1**
**AN ELASTIC YARDSTICK FOR MEASURING THE GROWTH OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT**

| | 1955[a] | 1983[a] | *Percent change from 1955 to 1983* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Dollar Expenditures (in billions)[b] | | | |
| National | 70.3 | 733.4 | 943.2 |
| State-Local | 40.4 | 434.1 | 974.5 |
| Total | 110.7 | 1167.5 | 954.7 |
| Public Expenditures as a Percent of GNP[c] | | | |
| National | 17.6 | 22.2 | 26.1 |
| State-Local | 10.1 | 13.1 | 29.7 |
| Total | 27.7 | 35.3 | 27.4 |
| Public Sector Employees[d] (in millions) | | | |
| National | 2.378 | 2.752 | 15.7 |
| State-Local | 5.054 | 13.099 | 159.2 |
| Total | 7.432 | 15.851 | 113.3 |
| Public Sector Employees per 1,000 Population[e] | | | |
| National | 14.4 | 12.1 | −16.0 |
| State-Local | 30.6 | 57.8 | 88.9 |
| Total | 45.0 | 69.9 | 55.3 |

[a]Fiscal year.

[b]Excluding intergovernmental cash transfers; shown in current dollars, that is, not controlled for inflation.

[c]GNP, in current dollars, is based on calendar years 1955 and 1983.

[d]Figures for public-sector employees represent civilian workers only, both full-time and part-time.

[e]The national population figure used in calculating 1983 data is based upon 1982 U.S. Bureau of the Census estimates of 226,547,000.

*Sources:* Data on public expenditures in 1955 are taken from U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970, Part 2* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), Series Y522–32, p. 1,119; Series Y590–604, p. 1,123; and Series Y671–81, p. 1,127. Data on 1983 expenditures are taken from U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, *Survey of Current Business*, 64 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, July 1984), pp. 44–46. Gross National Product (GNP) data for 1955 are taken from U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1979*, 100th edition (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979). GNP data for 1983 are taken from U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, *Survey of Current Business*, p. 22. Data on public employment for 1955 are taken from U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Part 2*, Series Y272–89, p. 1100. Data on public employment for 1983 are taken from U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, *Survey of Current Business*, p. 1100–10. Population figures for 1955 are taken from U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Part 2*, Series A6–8, p. 8; and for 1983, from U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Public Employment in 1982* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983), Series GE82, No. 1, p. 96.

The sharp decline in bureaucracy's general public standing has coincided with both increasing complexity in the nation's problems and (ironically) much higher levels of competence among government bureaucrats. Both Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, even as they undertook to reduce the size and role of bureaucracies, acknowledged the honesty, integrity,

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