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# MUSIC OF THE SQUARES
# A LIFETIME OF STUDY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Herbert Kaufman

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# MUSIC OF THE SQUARES
## A Lifetime of Study of Public Administration

Herbert Kaufman

If my father had not been a lawyer, I probably would not have become a political scientist. As far back as grade school, I wanted to be a lawyer like him, and I cleaved to that intention all the way through my junior year at CCNY, the City College of New York. Majoring in political science seemed to me the natural way to prepare for law school; indeed, I dare say most of us who majored in political science at that time planned to enter law school. The discipline to us was not an end in itself, but an avenue to something else.

To tell the truth, I was not enthralled by the discipline when I was first exposed to it. My recollection is that formal structure and procedure made up most of what we were required to learn in our freshman and sophomore courses. The rest was a free-wheeling discussion of abstract ideology, with which I didn't feel comfortable. It was as though government and politics were nothing more than a mass of detail and ill-formed opinion, an aggregation of mechanics and generalities with little relationship to life. I found the subject tedious. But, in my innocence, I stuck grimly to it because I thought that was the way one got ready for law school. Nobody said it was supposed to be fun.

I was in my junior year when Walter R. Sharp was lured from the University of Wisconsin to head up and modernize and

revitalize the Department of Government at CCNY. He brought in a group of exciting young instructors, including Samuel Hendel and Maure L. Goldschmidt, whom I found inspiring and who opened intellectual vistas for me that I had not till then imagined. (Maure Goldschmidt, I remember, used to have a small group of us out to his apartment to discuss some of the classics. I had never been in a professor's house before, nor had I ever before had such eye-opening and exhilarating academic conversations. Those sessions were for me an introduction to the pleasures of learning and exploring as contrasted with proving I had done my homework or practicing the arts of caviling and quibbling. They gave me a new outlook on the purposes and rewards of education.) I began to take a genuine interest in what I was doing.

In addition to his administrative duties, Walter Sharp also taught the first course in public administration ever to be offered by the department. I found myself intrigued by the process of transforming pronouncements of policy intentions--the wishes of elected officials and the language of legislation--into tangible governmental actions. Indeed, something of a crusading aura surrounded the field in those days; the New Deal and my political hero, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, were under constant attack for alleged administrative shortcomings and abuses, so that learning how to improve administration and entering the public service were ways of defending the faith. The bureaucracy was in the forefront of social and political change; a bit of glamor attached to public administration. Admittedly, Leonard D.

White's textbook, which had only recently been revised for the first time, and which was the core of the course, did not capture much of this drama. But it called attention to a side of the governmental system I had not heard discussed elsewhere, and it extolled the nobility of the civil service. I was intrigued.

At the same time, my certainty that I wanted to become a lawyer began to flag. I had read a fair number of cases in constitutional law, and they didn't enchant me. My classmates bound for law school included a good many activists with a zest for political involvement of every kind that I didn't share; I admired, and indeed envied, their enthusiasm and devotion to causes, but it became clear to me that I was temperamentally and intellectually unsuited to the profession that came naturally to them. Besides, my family was in financial straits, and I reasoned that I could get a master's degree in one year and then enter the bureaucracy to help out instead of spending three years as a drain on our limited resources. So, in my senior year, instead of applying to law school, I sought admission to the Department of Public Law and Government (as it was then called) at Columbia. I was accepted, and with the aid of a teaching assistantship at City College, embarked on graduate study concentrated in the field of public administration.

Arthur W. Macmahon held the chair in public administration at Columbia. I took all three of the courses he offered, plus one in administrative law in the Law School and one in public utilities regulation in the Business School. When I

concentrated, I really concentrated. One of Macmahon's offerings was a seminar in which student research projects provided the material for discussion. At his suggestion, I wrote a paper on administrative procedure in the Office of Price Administration (OPA). Although the attack on Pearl Harbor had drawn us into World War II months earlier, governmental machinery to prosecute the war and deal with the economic problems engendered by military and industrial mobilization was just being established. To prevent runaway inflation, a general price freeze had been enacted. But everyone knew the economy could not function if adjustments were not made to accommodate rapidly changing conditions. The OPA was set up to administer these adjustments and, eventually, to handle rationing of scarce commodities. Preparing my report on the creation of the organization, the issuance of regulations, and the operation of the appeals process was like learning to swim by being dropped in the water; initially, I was overwhelmed, but soon I was also fascinated. I was pleased with my new choice of career.

Before my first semester of graduate school was completed (but far enough along for me to get credit for the full term), I was drafted into the army. Thus began my second immersion in the realities of public administration. I served in the combat engineer battalion of an infantry division, and when the war ended in Europe, managed to get myself transferred to a military government detachment in Bavaria. I returned to civilian life a little more than three years from the day I left it, and, under

the GI Bill of Rights, resumed my studies at Columbia. I took up the second semester of my interrupted year, and, still fascinated with administrative procedure, wrote my master's essay under Arthur Macmahon's direction on the Administrative Procedure Act. Walter Gellhorn read the essay and suggested that I try to get it published. It was accepted by the Boston University Law Review, and it was my first publication.

By this time--the Spring of 1946--I was impatient with schooling and wanted to get into the thick of public administration. For me, that meant Washington. The New Deal was behind us and the administrative machinery of the war was being dismantled; now it was the states and the cities that were to face staggering administrative challenges. Nevertheless, public administration then was almost synonymous in my mind with the national capital. When I heard about the administrative internships program of the National Institute of Public Affairs, (which had been running since 1938 with support from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Foundation), I applied eagerly. Although the internships carried no stipend, they were eligible for support under the GI Bill, and they opened the way to placements in the federal administrative establishment to which I could not otherwise have aspired realistically even if I had known about them, especially in that period of postwar retrenchment. Happily, I was accepted and, in the Fall of 1946, as a member of the twelfth group of interns, went to Washington for the first time in my life. The program was to run for a full academic year

after having run two groups a year during the war.

There were about three dozen of us. Three-quarters of the group were women, and were housed in Virginia. The men, almost all veterans, had rooms in the Brookings Institution, which was then located on Jackson Place, facing Lafayette Park, where an entrance to the New Executive Office Building is now situated. The few married interns took apartments elsewhere. Despite our dispersal, the members of the group saw a great deal of each other because of the frequent evening meetings and discussions, an association that would prove important to me because I learned vicariously about many different aspects of Washington as the group scattered to placements all over the city. In addition, the men at Brookings were especially fortunate because Robert F. Steadman, then of the Maxwell School at Syracuse University, and that year's visiting advisor to the NIPA program, had a room with us at Brookings, and we spent many a night in bull sessions with him. My year as an intern was an exceedingly fruitful one for me.

The placement I settled on after our orientation period was in the Administrative Management Division of the Bureau of the Budget. I was assigned to Harvey Sherman, an extraordinarily gifted man who would later count the presidency of the American Society for Public Administration among his many achievements. Sherman and I began a vigorous exchange of ideas and formed a deep friendship, both of which lasted until his death many years later. At that time, he was a leading figure in planning and

conducting conferences on organization and methods (work simplification, work measurement, quality control, administrative analysis) for administrative analysts in line agencies from all over the government. I did a variety of simple clerical chores in return for the privilege of sitting in on the conferences. I found the material interesting at first, but it began to pall after a while, and I was happy to drift off into other areas, including budgeting and a stint on the research staff of President Truman's Committee on Civil Rights. Life as an administrative analyst, it was clear, was not for me.

Yet it was during this period that I turned to a line of inquiry that would preoccupy me for years. I had come to Washington with the preconception that a relatively small group of powerful businessmen controlled all of political life in this country. That was folk wisdom when I was an undergraduate, a bowdlerized version of Marxism that was common in much of the popular and scholarly literature of those years. (What came to be known as pluralism was in many ways a reaction against this simplistic premise, which in recent years has been resurgent in some academic circles against oversimplified interpretations of pluralism.) I wondered how control by the elite was accomplished, and I searched for the means from my own vantage points in the government and in the experiences of my fellow interns, with whom I compared notes. I believed the means of control would be easy to detect because they would be arrogantly and flagrantly employed --as, indeed, they often are. But the

portrait that emerged was much more muddled and contradictory than I expected, as anyone more politically and methodologically sophisticated than I would have predicted. The ambiguous evidence did not prompt me to abandon my preconception--neither the first nor the last instance of my submission to the vested interest in an idea. Rather, I ascribed the ambiguity to the subtlety of the elite and the naivete and crudeness of my mode of examination. Properly conducted studies of governmental decision-making, I was sure, would disclose the techniques by which the hidden ruling group achieved its ends. I doubted that such studies were necessary because I was so certain the preconception I had grown up with was indisputable. Still, as an intellectual problem, the question tantalized and troubled me, and I kept returning to it.

I was in the midst of these ruminations when I met Herbert A. Simon. He was the speaker at one of the sessions of the organization and methods conferences, and was known primarily for articles questioning the axioms of public administration as well as for coauthoring a booklet on the measurement of municipal activities. His performance at the conference was dazzling, and I was delighted when Harvey Sherman invited me to join him and a colleague and Simon for lunch. There I discovered that Simon was about publish a book subtitled, "A Study of Decision-Making Processes in Administrative Organization;" it was, of course, the first edition of <u>Administrative Behavior</u>. What he told us about it aroused my enthusiasm. Here was an approach to the problem by

which I was seized. I did not assume that decision-making in administrative organizations was necessarily the same as decision-making in more inclusive social, political, and economic systems. But I figured that learning about the processes in less comprehensive organizations would be a great deal more feasible than, and possibly good preparation for, larger undertakings. Besides, I was still interested in the dynamics of the executive branch, and Simon's analytical framework provided a systematic way of thinking about the subject. Thereafter, each time he appeared at a conference, I made sure to attend his presentation. His way of looking at administration was opening new conceptual doors for me.

As my internship year drew to a close, I was more and more inclined to return to Columbia and seek a doctorate instead of taking a job in the government at once. Actually, many aspects of government service appealed to me, and I was anxious to get off the GI Bill and start earning a living. At the same time, I was convinced that if I once got started on a civil service career, I would be unlikely to relinquish salary and seniority to start over again in the academic world. Moreover, I had several years of entitlement remaining under the GI Bill; I thought I had better take advantage of them while I had no responsibilities or sunk costs. Once the degree was acquired, I reckoned that I would have a chance at teaching or research, and, if those occupations proved unattractive or unattainable, could probably enter government service at a somewhat higher level than was

immediately open to me. It would mean opting for the proverbial birds in the bush rather than the one in hand. At the same time, as Simon pointed out, proverbs come in contradictory pairs; nothing ventured, nothing gained. I pondered the choices before me.

My uncertainties were resolved when the Institute of Public Administration in New York, then headed by Luther Gulick, announced the availability of research associateships for 1947-48, and accepted my application for one of them. It carried a stipend, provided research support, allowed me to take some courses at Columbia, and Columbia (thanks to Arthur Macmahon) was even willing to accept some of my work at the Institute for credit toward my doctorate. The opportunity dovetailed perfectly with my plans and aspirations. Circumstances made my choice for me.

The Institute had just embarked on a study of forestry in the United States. I admitted that I had no special interest in forestry, but declared that my study of administrative decision-making could be conducted in a forestry agency as readily as in any other. This project was not quite what some of the Institute staff had in mind for me, and questions were raised. Just about this time, Administrative Behavior appeared, and though it was generally regarded as critical of Luther Gulick's analysis of administrative organization, I appealed to Gulick for permission to proceed along lines indicated by Simon. Despite Simon's treatment of his views, he not only agreed at once; he encouraged

my inquiry. That was how my first study of decision-making happened to be centered in the U. S. Forest Service.

As I became acquainted with the Service through background reading, I realized what a fortunate choice this was. The strong territorial pattern of organization made it possible to compare decision-makers in similar organizational situations, facilitating isolation of the influences on their behavior. And when I discovered that the district rangers were resource managers with significant discretion, I was delighted; the influences on them, I surmised, would not be as extensive and complicated as those at higher levels, and would therefore be more manageable from a research standpoint, yet their responsibilities were broad and varied enough to affect agency policy in their districts. So I elected to make them the focus of my study. I sent Simon an outline of my plan, and he responded favorably. Gulick, too, was pleased with this strategy, for he himself had written that "Much of the actual discretion used in administration is used at the very bottom of the hierarchy, where public servants touch the public." At Columbia, my research prospectus was approved as a dissertation topic. Everything was in place.

What I was doing was a far cry from answering the question about power in society that was the source of my original concern with decision-making. But I hoped illuminating some neglected aspects of administrative behavior would also shed light on larger issues; indeed, I <u>still</u> consider it relevant to political

theory. However that may be, I was able to convince myself that focusing on the field officers of the Forest Service would be a useful and instructive undertaking. I was sure _I_ at least would learn a great deal from the inquiry, and if it succeeded, it would win me a degree. I was on my way.

Unfortunately, the resources available at the Institute allowed me to conduct field research in only one ranger district. For this and other reasons, it was received with something less than enthusiasm at Columbia. After some revisions, however, it was accepted. My degree was awarded in January of 1950. The career choice I had deferred two and a half years earlier now confronted me once again. I had to decide what I was going to do.

Once again, circumstances made a decision for me. In 1948, leading public-administration scholars at four institutions--Columbia, Cornell, Princeton, and Syracuse--had formed a consortium, financed by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation, to produce case studies in public administration. The aim of the program was to supplement textbooks, then leaning increasingly toward formal abstractions, by providing concrete illustrations of the administrative process. Harold Stein was the executive director of the Committee on Public Administration Cases, and Luther Gulick sent him my manuscript for possible inclusion in the Committee's projected series. Stein liked the manuscript, but judged that it did not fall within the Committee's definition of a case study; the Committee sought descriptions of the way

particular administrative actions came to be taken rather than more general institutional analyses. Stein invited me to propose a study within these guidelines, recommending that I do something in the New York region because the Committee had no funds to pay for extensive travel. As soon as my degree was in hand, I set out to work up a prospectus.

One of the topics that came to mind was a conflict ten years or so earlier between Mayor Fiorello H. La Guardia and the municipal Civil Service Commission. Wallace S. Sayre had been a member of that body at the time, and was now teaching at the School of Business and Civic Administration of CCNY (later the Baruch School). He was also a member of the Committee on Public Administration Cases, having taught at Cornell when the Committee was established. The first time I met him was when I went to see him about the possibilities of such a case. He thought it was not a good choice because it would require a much lengthier treatment than the case studies the Committee then contemplated, much of it was now obscured by time, and there was some question about selecting events in which Committee members had been principals. He suggested instead that I consider a currently breaking story, the transfer of the big new air field (now John F. Kennedy Airport) under construction in Queens from the jurisdiction of New York City to the Port of New York Authority (now the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey). I looked into it, found the subject absorbing, drafted a proposal which Stein accepted, and proceeded to write my first case study. It

went well, and I wrote two more in the months that followed. Meanwhile, enchanted by Wallace Sayre, I was in touch with him at every opportunity. He was a font of wisdom, knowledge, compassion, good humor, and sparkling conversation. Every meeting with him was a delight and an educational experience, from the day I met him until the day he died. We were to become close friends and collaborators; he had a profound impact on my thinking and my career.

But I still had not made a definite career choice. Once again, circumstances pointed the way for me. In 1951, Norman Wengert, teaching at my alma mater, City College, went on leave. Walter Sharp was still chairman, and he offered me an appointment as part-time lecturer (nine hours, a total of four different courses!) to fill in. It was my first teaching post, and I got my training on the job. It must have been hard on the students; it was certainly hard on me. Yet I enjoyed it, and without having deliberately elected to do so, I was launched on a teaching career. During those apprenticeship days, despite all my formal training, preparing for class taught me about aspects of the discipline that I had previously skirted. Among them was state and local government, in which I was called upon to give a course and which was to become my second field of specialization in addition to public administration.

Within a year, Sharp was appointed to the faculty at Yale. Wallace Sayre replaced him as chairman. Thus, I was brought into closer contact with him than ever before. And so it happened

that when he was asked by Luther Gulick to prepare a report on personnel administration in the government of New York City for the Mayor's Committee on Management Survey, of which Gulick had been made executive director, he invited me to collaborate with him. Gulick approved, and in early 1952, we submitted what was our first joint effort. In the course of that collaboration, Sayre, whose qualifications for the job included not only his service with La Guardia's civil service commission, but several years as personnel officer of the Office of Price Administration during World War II, taught me the facts of life about personnel specialists, civil service politics, bureaucratic intransigence, merit system myths and realities, and what he would later describe in his memorable phrase as "the triumph of technique over purpose." Just to prove his points, he would predict the reactions of the personnel establishment to various points in our document, and he never missed. I should have paid him tuition for the course.

In the Spring of 1953, I was appointed assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at Yale for a term beginning with the 1953-54 academic year. I anticipated spending the summer in intensive preparation of my courses, but Wallace Sayre was made the research director of the Temporary [New York] State Commission to Study the Organizational Structure of the Government of the City of New York and offered me a position on his staff. It was too interesting an opportunity to pass up, and the summer was devoted to the work of the Commission.

This body was established by the state at the behest of Governor Thomas E. Dewey, who was irked by the constant fiscal demands on the state treasury made by city officials, all Democrats, and by the political liability for him and his party of having to deny many of those demands. Although the nine members of the bipartisan Commission were city residents, they were all appointed by the governor and state legislative leaders. Dewey's ostensible reason for creating it was to improve municipal efficiency and thus enable the city to live on its own resources. It was widely rumored, however, that he hoped to bring about the adoption of a nonpartisan city-manager form of government in place of the city's strong-mayor form, thereby diminishing the political resources of the Democrats while at the same time achieving the managerial improvements he sought.

If that was what he hoped for, his hopes were doomed when the Commission selected Sayre as its research director. Sayre held that the independently elected, politically powerful chief executive was America's unique contribution to the art of government. (That's one of the reasons he was an extraordinarily well-informed student of the Presidency.) He might have conceded that in small jurisdictions, a nonpartisan professional could provide needed leadership. Given our history and our diversity, he was convinced that in large units of government, only a popularly elected chief could mobilize the power to prevent deadlock. His eloquent, cogent argument persuaded the chairman and members of the Commission; instead of discarding the strong

mayoralty in their final recommendations, they proposed strengthening the institution by equipping it with new administrative capabilities. From years of exposure to the doctrines of public administration, I was already a champion of the presidency. But I was also indoctrinated with the advantages of the city-manager form of government for all municipalities, large and small. Sayre's analysis, animated by his love of politics, his command of history, and his political sophistication, added new dimensions to my thinking about public executives.

I departed for New Haven shortly before the Commission completed its work and embarked on what was probably the most intensely stimulating period of my professional life. The Department of Political Science was a collection of current and future stars, many of them leading the discipline in new directions, and my recollection is that we used to see a good deal of each other. The intellectual ferment was invigorating. A flow of exceptional graduate students, many destined to become leaders in the profession, enlivened and enriched the intellectual atmosphere. (Up to then, I had assumed students who were abler than their instructors would be resentful and contemptuous. What a pleasure it was to discover that my most gifted ones viewed the educational process as a cooperative venture in which they learned by teaching me as well as by being taught! And what splendid teachers they were, too!) I was assigned to an interdisciplinary program with an economist and a

historian in which we examined power in American society, and thus found myself wrestling again with the problem of how policy decisions are reached. Victor Jones at Wesleyan invited me to participate in an inter-university committee discussing political behavior. (One of the people who made a presentation to the committee was Floyd Hunter, whose evidence of a tight-knit elite completely dominating Atlanta seemed unconvincing, for reasons Jones and I advanced in a subsequent review of his book, to all the committee members, further undermining my confidence in elitist doctrines.) And I met sociologist Richard D. Schwartz and visiting social psychologist Donald T. Campbell, who jointly introduced me to the concepts and literature of societal evolution (as contrasted with Social Darwinism), sparking a line of thought that would play a larger and larger part in my approach to organization theory and behavior. The environment was positively exhilarating.

In addition, between 1954 and 1956, I became involved in four research and writing undertakings that profoundly affected my professional and intellectual development. Wallace Sayre had a hand in three of them.

The first was a brief history of the federal government service. In the Spring of 1954, Sayre was asked by the American Assembly to organize a meeting on the federal government service. The American Assembly was a program operated by Columbia University to bring together leaders and experts from all sectors of American life to discuss public problems and recommend

policies to deal with them. Each group was given a set of background papers that served to inform the discussion and set the agenda. Sayre invited me to prepare a brief history of the federal government service as one of the background papers for his gathering, and to take part in the proceedings. I had long been aware, of course, of the way power over the selection of federal officers and employees had migrated from elected officials to the professional politicians who ran the political parties and then to personnel specialists as civil service requirements were extended throughout the government service. What struck me as I drafted my overview was the growing chorus of complaints among top elected and appointed public executives of unquestioned integrity and ability that they were hindered in the performance of their duties by the morass of personnel procedures in which they were mired; the system conceived to improve the operations of government by reducing the influence of party politicians seemed to have introduced a new set of obstacles to effective leadership. Politically neutral bureaucracies were generally more competent technically than bureaucracies chosen for their political loyalties, but they were problematic in other ways. The centrifugal tendencies of the governmental system, always powerful, were reinforced by the procedural insulation of governmental work forces. Fragmentation and the frustration of overarching leadership were intensified. In public administration as it had been taught to me, not much was said about this consequence of civil-service reform. I began to

wonder what other implications of public-administration doctrines were imbedded in the field's unarticulated premises. Had I too unquestioningly accepted as established "principles" arguments addressed to a particular phenomenon without regard to their other consequences for the governmental system?

This uneasiness I discussed with some of my colleagues, but I did nothing more than that for a while. As the 1956 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association approached, the program committee decided to commemorate the hundredth year of Woodrow Wilson's birth by making his political and academic achievements a theme of the convention. Wallace Sayre played a key role in that aspect of the meeting, and one of Wilson's accomplishments selected for special attention was his contribution to the development of public administration as a specialty within the discipline. Partly, I suppose, because of the concern I had expressed, and partly because of my American Assembly piece, I was invited to present a paper on the growth of public administration as a field. That paper, "Emerging Conflicts in the Doctrines of Public Administration," reviewed the values implicit in the evolution of governmental structure in the United States, contended that public administration as a field had arisen when advocates of two of the values happened for a time to be in agreement about the measures needed to advance their preferences, and predicted that this conjunction of interests led to a temporary alliance that would eventually come apart as conditions changed and partisans of the different values

would take conflicting positions on the proper role of public bureaucracies in a democracy. (Twelve years later, I would return to this subject in another paper to see if the argument held up. I found abundant evidence that time had borne out my analysis. Of course, I'm not the most impartial judge, but the case for this conclusion seems pretty strong to me.) My doubts about the conventional wisdom in the field were solidifying. I was no longer inclined to take much for granted.

While all this was going on, Resources for the Future, a Washington-based research organization promoting studies of natural-resource policies, discovered my dissertation on the U. S. Forest Ranger. Marion Clawson, a former head of the Bureau of Land Management, was intrigued by this approach to the administrative problems of resource management. But he thought--and I wholeheartedly agreed--that a study of a single ranger district was not an adequate basis for judgment, and in 1955 he offered to pay travel costs and some summer salary if I would expand the research. We agreed that five districts in different parts of the country would be feasible and acceptable, and so, after negotiations with the Forest Service, I was set by late 1956 to resume work on what was eventually published as _The Forest Ranger_, a project for which my dissertation turned out to be only a pilot inquiry.

In roughly the same interval, Wallace Sayre sounded out Donald Young, the president of the Russell Sage Foundation, about the possibility of support for one of Sayre's longstanding

visions, an analysis of the government and politics of the City of New York. Sayre, a West Virginian by birth, loved and enjoyed New York. He regarded the absence of a full-fledged political-science treatment of the subject as an intolerable gap in the discipline and in the literature on the city. He wrote me that Young did not discourage him from submitting a proposal, and he wondered if I would be interested in collaborating with him. Despite my commitment to Resources for the Future, I found the prospect too attractive to decline. Working with Sayre always was! It also meant a chance to examine decision-making in an altogether new context. Neither he nor Marion Clawson objected to my undertaking both projects simultaneously. Together, Sayre and I drew up our proposal to the Russell Sage Foundation. It was accepted, and we set out on a new adventure.

The target date for completing both manuscripts was 1959. Yale granted me a full year of leave in the 1956-57 academic year and half-time leave for 1957-58, and I plunged into the busiest three-year period of my life. It was a hard pull at times, and I occasionally regretted my sanguine estimate of how much I could do. But the burden was eased by the sense of discovery and the fascinating quality of the data. The work went well, and the common deadline for both projects was met.

(I digress for a moment to record an amusing anecdote. As Sayre and I were finishing the New York book, he reported to me that he had met Harold Stein at a meeting and that Stein had instructed him to tell me I should be doing work more work on my

own. "I answered," Sayre said with a grin, "'You bastard, why do you choose me to deliver that message?'" I took their point.)

On the surface, the two projects in which I was engaged seem wildly disparate. What could be more remote from New York City than some of the ranger districts I visited? The studies were alike, however, in that they sought to find out how decisions were reached in the organizations examined. Because the organizations were so dissimilar, the findings were not identical for both. Yet some of the same properties appeared pronouncedly in the two organizations. These resemblances would preoccupy me in future years.

Among the outstanding dissimilarities between the two organizations was the unity, the cohesion, the consensus, and the sense of common purpose in the administration of the national forests by the Forest Service as contrasted with the unremitting and barely contained clash of values, interests, attitudes, backgrounds, standards, methods, goals, and feelings in the city. This contrast was not just a matter of size; the Forest Service had such a diverse menu of responsibilities that bitter factionalism and conflict among its components would not have been surprising. What unified the agency was the way it succeeded in implanting in its personnel a common set of values, outlooks, and understandings. Much of its reputation for excellence and probity, which was widespread and well deserved, arose from the teamwork of a group of people who thought alike in important respects. They thought alike because the agency was

skillful in developing in each of its members a relatively uniform outlook and way of thinking.

This finding troubled me. It put me in mind of Brave New World and 1984, and while I never believed or claimed that the members of the Service were victims of the kind of total brainwashing described in those novels, the mere tendency toward mind control disturbed me. I was further distressed by the realization that the success of the Forest Service sprang in large measure from that very program of instilling agency-inspired thought patterns in those who joined it. And I was puzzled by the enigma that the better the Forest Service became at promoting a Service-designed, unity-fostering thought pattern in its members, the greater the risk that the agency's adaptability to changing conditions would be reduced; this dilemma I referred to as "the hazards of managerial success." These were not problems I expected to find when I began my inquiry.

When I saw where my observations were leading me, I decided to distribute the descriptive chapters of my manuscript in the Forest Service for review and comment before circulating my inferences about what the descriptions implied. I feared that many officers in the agency would be offended by the comparison with Aldous Huxley's and George Orwell's grim portraits of the future, and would raise endless objections to details in the descriptive sections in order to discredit the analysis. If they corrected and approved the factual sections before they read my

interpretation, I surmised, they could not protest that my inferences were drawn from inaccurate information.

I needn't have been concerned. When they received the conclusions, they raised no objections. Indeed, I learned much later that they were delighted and a bit surprised by what they saw as a totally favorable portrayal of the Service. The depressing and worrisome and faintly menacing elements were either overlooked or ignored.

Outside the agency, these elements generally haven't received much attention, either. Perhaps few people are alarmed because the danger of mind control seems too slight to worry about. Perhaps the resulting risks of inadaptability also seem too remote to warrant anxiety. Or maybe the need to strike a balance in organizations and societies between controlled thought and behavior on the one hand and creativity and spontaneity on the other is too obvious to require discussion. At any rate, my concerns did not prove contagious. Readers of <u>The Forest Ranger</u> appear generally to have been more interested in the means by which the Forest Service secured compliance on the part of lower-level executives than in the potential disadvantages attached to those techniques. Yet the potential disadvantages kept nagging at me.

Curiously, the study of New York--<u>Governing New York City</u>--on which Sayre and I were working engendered similar qualms. The focus of our inquiry was the question, who runs the city government? We did not start with preconceived answers. To be

sure, we had misgivings about Floyd Hunter's contention that Atlanta was completely dominated by a small, tight-knit elite. But our doubts arose from what we considered flaws in his methodology and from contrary evidence in his own data, not from personal preferences. We did not rule out the possibility that his conclusion might be valid and more convincingly demonstrated by a different approach. Our minds were certainly open to that finding.

The data pushed us toward a pluralist conclusion. A relatively limited set of political participants unquestionably played key roles in each major sphere of municipal activity, but there was little overlap among the sets, and no single set was influential in all, or even in many, of the spheres. Most were virtually indifferent to what happened in spheres outside their own, even when the long-run effects on them of decisions made elsewhere were quite considerable. The central institutions of the city government could be quite influential in any sphere if they chose to intervene in a concerted, determined fashion, but the system was so dispersed that they could not take an active part in many of them. Moreover, they were seldom united among themselves. Naturally, the decisions taken in some spheres had more widespread impacts through the rest of the system than actions taken in others. By and large, however, the system was characterized by fragmentation. That's why some commentators described it as ungovernable.

A system of this kind opens many lines of access to many

different kinds of people and interests. It also entails many significant costs and risks. We did not ignore or minimize these shortcomings. But we made the mistake of ending our book with a literary flourish of praise for the city, and the last line apparently overshadowed for many readers the balance for which we strove in the rest of the volume. We should have been more careful when we were exercising poetic license!

Among the systemic failings we identified were inherent tendencies toward deadlock and paralysis. The capacity to veto decisions and actions advanced by any set of participants in the governmental process was so widely distributed among other participants that the chances of _immobilisme_ seemed overwhelming. That the system did not come to a complete halt seemed something of a mystery, and the probability that innovations could be introduced seemed virtually nil. Indeed, many commentators wondered how a city beset by myriad points of blockage could function from day to day and respond to challenges as circumstances fluctuated. In the introduction to the paperback edition of our book, which appeared five years after the original version, we tried to explain why the city did not stagnate and even pioneered in innumerable ways. Still, the obstacles to adaptation were, and remain, impressive.

For totally different reasons, then, the Forest Service and the government of New York City shared an important attribute. Neither could change readily, the former because it expertly fitted its key personnel to the organization as it was, the

latter because so many people could delay or prevent measures they opposed. I was already familiar with the extensive literature on organizational resistance to change, and I was aware of the strength of habit and custom. Not until this time, however, did I begin think about inflexibility, with both its benefits and its threats to organizational longevity, as a nearly inescapable property of organizations. (One of the values of research, in my case, is that my own studies helped me understand much that I had read or been told.) My interest in organization theory and behavior intensified.

So in 1959-60, when I went off to the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences, that was the course I was going to pursue. I found the other Fellows so interesting, however, that I spent most of my time chatting with them (especially the anthropologists) and attending seminars and discussion groups; the year was wonderfully enlivening and broadening. (My memories of Ernest Nagel pressing me to explain what question my organizational studies were intended to answer are still particularly vivid.) Trying to devise an index of organizational centralization occupied the remainder of my time at the Center (and for a while afterwards); eventually, I gave it up as beyond my powers. But I returned to Yale more determined than ever to explore organization theory.

I was not able to give it my undivided attention for several years. Academic administrative duties descended on me. An earlier commitment to write a short textbook on state and local

government caught up with me. The city administration in New Haven, which had done me a favor by giving a graduate student access to its inner workings, called on me to serve as a volunteer on some municipal boards, and I felt obliged to accept. My paper on the federal government service had to be updated for a new edition of the American Assembly volume. So I didn't do much work in my chosen field in that period. I did manage, however, in 1961, for an interdisciplinary seminar on administrative theory at the University of Texas, to complete a paper on organizational behavior, which, though it did not receive much notice when it appeared in a fugitive pamphlet with the other papers at the seminar, was important to me because it was my first effort at an overview of the subject and drew together what had up to then been separate strands of thought, including an analysis of the role of uncertainty in the life of organizations. A couple of years later, spurred on by my experience at a seminar in the social science of organizations sponsored by the Graduate School of Business of The University of Pittsburgh, I presented a comparison of organization theory and political theory at a panel of the American Political Science Association meeting, which compelled me to systematize some more of my general impressions. My graduate seminar in administrative theory also kept me from losing touch with the field. I did not, however, engage in research again until the 1967-68 academic year, when, with the aid of a Yale faculty fellowship and a National Science Foundation grant, I went to Washington to spend

a year as a visiting scholar at the Brookings Institution. That year proved to be a turning point for me.

My research project was an effort to gather data in a variety of government bureaus in order to develop measures of some features of organization structure. It would take two years and the collaboration of a graduate student at Yale, David Seidman, before the research report was published. The techniques of mapping and measuring organization structure that we devised, and the findings of our study, sank without a trace. I was surprised and disappointed, and decided that that sort of inquiry was not my dish of tea. I also decided that because of my interest in the theory and behavior of government organizations, Washington was the place for me to be.

Consequently, when Brookings offered me an appointment as senior fellow in its Governmental Studies Program, I was highly gratified. My visit there was most enjoyable, the staff was extraordinarily lively and interesting, and access to the government through the institution was excellent. Moreover, even while I was at Yale, I had begun to feel I was growing stale as a teacher; I could not recover the sense of excitement I had known when I first started, and I was increasingly convinced that I was not likely to. Perhaps the time had come for me to move on.

I went back to Yale to mull over the choice before me. The thought of tearing up roots after sixteen years in a place where my wife and I had many close friends, were comfortably settled, and had been intellectually and professionally invigorated and

rewarded, was daunting. Besides, I thought, the year-long respite from teaching might restore the pleasures of the classroom for me. I agonize over small decisions; I anguished over this one.

The prospect of giving my undivided attention to research won out in the end. Early in the summer of 1969, we moved to Washington. A new chapter was about to begin.

It began with drafting lectures to be delivered the following year at the University of Alabama under the aegis of the Southern Regional Training Program and published by the University of Alabama Press. The preparation of that manuscript was in many ways a watershed for me. The first draft, picking up on a common theme in the New York and Forest Service volumes, concentrated almost exclusively on the intrinsic tendency toward "rigidity" in organizations, and examined at length the processes of "organizational sclerosis." My colleagues in the Governmental Studies Program at Brookings, especially the younger ones, tore it to shreds. What I treated as unthinking fixity of behavior, they insisted, could very well have been wise adaptations to circumstances calling for precisely such deportment. Moreover, they said, one organization's or person's stubborn inflexibility is another's steadfast adherence to principle. They decried my approach as too narrow, too dogmatically one-sided--too rigid, if you will. Talk about being hoist with your own petard! I destroyed the first draft and started all over again.

This time, I paid more attention to the relationship between

the internal dynamics of organizations and their environments. I had always professed to give full weight to this balance, but the criticisms of my associates at Brookings impressed on me how easy it is to neglect obvious factors as one intently traces out a single strand of an argument. My lectures, eventually published as The Limits of Organizational Change, still emphasized the obstacles to organizational change, but they took fuller account of the reasons why change occurs nevertheless and of the interactions between organizations and the ever-changing world in which they are immersed. It was here, for the first time, that I came explicitly to grips with the concept of organizational death and the conditions of organizational survival that I had only skirted before. Some of my tentative conclusions I would later discard, but the exercise set me on a path from which I would not again depart.

While I find broad theorizing congenial, I worry about losing touch with the substance of my speculations if I do not immerse myself from time to time in the details of organizational life. So my next step was a field study to find out whether the ability of the Forest Service to keep track of the decisions and actions of its district rangers was duplicated in other government bureaus. Monitoring subordinate behavior is a key element in controlling it. If the Forest Service was unique in this respect, my view of organizations might be distorted.

My research assistant and I examined nine bureaus. Some of them did not serve the public directly, but dispensed federal

funds to state or local agencies which then performed the actual operations. These, partly in response to statutory injunctions against taking over state and local functions, kept only loose tabs on work in the field. The others, however, turned out to be quite well-informed about what went on in the outer reaches of their organizations. They had excellent channels for finding out what field personnel were doing. The Forest Service may have been particularly good in this regard (even in its support of state and local forestry activities), but it was not a deviant case. Presumably, then, some of the risks of central control I perceived in the Forest Service were more general in the federal executive establishment.

If so, I reasoned, the danger of inadaptability, which seemed to me to potentially threaten the Forest Service, ought to be widespread in the executive branch. In that event, the common impression that government organizations are virtually immortal might be totally wrong. In an unstable environment, they could well have a high death rate. Logically, short life began to look at least as plausible as immortality.

My next project was to determine which plausible possibility was closer to the truth. I set out to chart the longevity of selected government organizations over a fifty-year period. And as I went through the tedious, time-consuming chore of gathering the data, I published a speculative essay on organizational evolution, "The Natural History of Organizations," sketching out my vision of the organizational world, which I hoped my empirical

study would confirm.

It didn't. Government organizations appeared to be quite long-lived, their persistence exceedingly impressive. Conventional lore was more or less corroborated. The high turnover I envisioned, which would have suggested a vigorous evolutionary process, did not seem to occur in the government milieu. To a considerable extent, this finding resulted from the limitations of my data; I was not yet ready to surrender my vision. (Again, the vested interest in an idea!) There were indications that if I had had more time and resources, the results might have been different. I wrote the heads of several government agencies that routinely use data about government structure, hoping they they could be interested in a large-scale, highly detailed, continuously updated map of the executive branch. I got nowhere.

I was considering how to proceed from there when Kermit Gordon, the president of the Brookings Institution, asked me if I could be tempted into examining a phenomenon that troubled him when he had been a government official--a plethora of elaborate and costly procedural requirements engendered by particular sets of circumstances that persist long after the circumstances that gave rise to them had disappeared. He thought of that as the essence of red tape, and he hoped I would be able to identify its origins so that it could be dealt with in a rational, constructive way. It sounded like an interesting respite. I agreed.

After working on it for a while, I realized that the

dynamics of the American political system accounted for most of manifestations of red tape that exercised Gordon. In writing about the sources of, and remedies for, red tape, I would essentially be describing the way the government works. The evidence surprised many readers of Red Tape, who apparently had thought of red tape as a product of bureaucratic inefficiency and stupidity; they never saw themselves as sources. The significance of the finding for my purposes, however, was that it documented another impediment to organizational adaptiveness. Snarled in a tangle of procedural and substantive specifications, each of which was adopted for high and reasonable ends, government organizations could not easily change their ways or structure. What's more, everybody denounced the conditions causing this immobility, yet the conditions persisted despite the unanimous denunciations and the intermittent efforts to alter them. It was as though the conditions were beyond control. Attributing this state of affairs to bureaucrats, I later contended in an article entitled "Fear of Bureaucracy," was patently erroneous; rather, to my way of thinking, the situation suggested a process driven by a logic of its own rather than by the deliberate manipulations of some dominant group.

Springing as it did from a study originated by somebody else and seemingly unrelated to the line of inquiry I had been pursuing, this additional indication of a dynamics sweeping organizations along willy-nilly convinced me of the plausibility of my impression such a mechanism was at work. On the other hand,

I had been brought up to believe that the heads of line bureaus in government are extremely powerful officials with great influence over the course of events in which they are involved. I had long been curious about the way they exerted this influence; having examined the Forest Service from the ground up, I wondered what bureaus would look like seen from the top down. My curiosity was now reinforced by the contradiction between what I kept finding whenever I examined the organizational world and what I had long accepted as an obvious truth. (Skeptical as I had become, I still stumbled across propositions I had accepted on faith long before.)

I therefore decided to observe closely a number of "specimen" federal bureau chiefs. With the aid of a grant from the National Science Foundation, I initiated a probe of six chiefs chosen with both diversity and comparability in mind. The findings are reported in The Administrative Behavior of Federal Bureau Chiefs.

To put the results in the most general terms, my major conclusion was that the chiefs were so enmeshed in complexes of factors driving and limiting them that their capacity to shape their agencies and to set policy was sharply restricted. To be sure, each of them influenced the organization he headed, but in marginal ways for the most part, or in ways whose effects would not be known for a long time, if ever. On the whole, though, their experience seemed to me much like rafting in swift-running waters. They were able to accomplish relatively modest (though

often important) adjustments, but were carried along by a stream of forces they could not command.

This finding was consistent with the public-administration doctrine denying the allegation that government bureaucracies are out of control. At the same time, it fortified my sense of a process ruled by its own internal dynamics rather than by the occupants of formal leadership positions. It also shook my confidence in longstanding assumptions about the preeminence of bureau chiefs in the governmental system.

Devotees of leadership and entrepreneurship have challenged these findings. Was I so blinded by my ever-growing confidence in an underlying process that my research made such a conclusion inevitable? Was my interpretation determined by my preconceptions? Was my sample of chiefs atypical? I had tried to guard against these faults. Perhaps these doubts will be resolved one way or the other in the course of time. Meanwhile, buttressed by the acquiescence of my subjects, I view this project as one more bit of evidence that change is heavily damped in organizations, and that the ability of leaders to alter what their organizations do and the way they do it is sharply restricted.

I decided the time had come for me to try to put these bits and pieces of data and speculation and vague hunches together in a systematically formulated hypothesis. If nothing else, the effort would help me order my own perceptions of organizations. If it went well, I was conceited enough to hope it would advance

the general understanding of organizations by opening new avenues of inquiry and new ways of thinking. Anyway, I was determined to try.

The Brookings Institution, which had long tolerated my research even though it was not in the mainstream of policy studies, found this project too remote from its mission to support. So when the Russell Sage Foundation, in response to my inquiry about its willingness to assist me, invited me to spend academic year 1981-82 at the Foundation in New York as one of a number of visiting scholars, I accepted eagerly and gratefully. As my ideas unfolded, however, even the Foundation began to regard them as strange. At the end of my year in residence, I returned to Brookings, but as a visiting scholar without salary because I wanted to continue work on my hypothesis and was resolved that nothing would be allowed to divert me from that objective. Fortunately, Marshall Robinson, the president of the Russell Sage Foundation, provided a small grant from his discretionary fund that enabled me to stay at my last through the end of 1984. At that point, I went on pension and thus was able to complete the manuscript.

Time, Chance, and Organizations: Natural Selection in a Perilous Environment, was the outcome of my ruminations. As the title indicates, it's a Darwinian interpretation of the organizational world, in which chance plays a major part in the survival and extinction of organizations. A thumbnail sketch of the argument is that since change in organizations is damped and

the organizational environment is generally highly variable, survival is more a matter of luck than skill. This deduction is surprising to me, and I admit to being no more comfortable with it than some of my critics are. But it's where my logic and my interpretation of the evidence led me. Let the marketplace of ideas be the judge of its validity or error.

The book sets out ways of testing its validity. Originally, I had thought I would follow it up by conducting the tests. It's clear that they call for skills I lack, for more energy than I can muster, and for patience I no longer have. So I have satisfied myself by drafting some clarifications of the argument in response to the few published reviews of the volume, most of which rejected the thesis--prematurely, I try to establish. If another printing of the book ever appears, perhaps these rejoinders will see the light of day. I hope so, for they might persuade graduate students here and there that something in the hypothesis is worth investigating. If there is not enough interest in the analysis to justify another printing, or if it sinks without a trace, the verdict of the marketplace of ideas will have been pronounced, and that will be that. All the same, in my heart of hearts, again proving the power of vested interest in an idea, I'll continue to believe it has merit, and will hope that some day somebody will vindicate my faith. The public-administration phase of my journey is over.

In recounting this intellectual journey, I have passed over some side trips I took along the way. For example, I had not

been at Yale long when James W. Fesler, who has been a constant source of encouragement, ideas, and wise counsel ever since I met him, raised with me the question (inspired in part by inquiries from Yale alumni in Washington) of establishing a program of professional public-administration career training outside the Department of Political Science. (After careful consideration, we concluded that public administration and political science are intellectually inseparable, that more would be lost than gained by dividing them from one another organizationally, and we therefore rejected proposals to set them apart administratively.) Also, for a time, as a member of the board of the Inter-University Case Program, I puzzled over the best way to employ case studies for research as well as for teaching. In addition, my excursion into comparative public administration was a less casual flirtation than this account may intimate. And my labors in the field of state and local government were more extensive and serious than my narrative may imply. But they were all digressions from the main line of development. Through it all, I had an overriding preoccupation, and everything else was a variation on that central theme.

Since I believe chance plays a large part in everyone's life, I find myself wondering whether this portrait of my voyage is not romantically rationalized. One often drifts from opportunity to opportunity. The trajectory of one's life is probably best represented by zig-zag lines. Rare, surely, are the people who got to where they are through a series of rational

decisions. To find a dominant theme in my own history therefore astonishes and unsettles me. I find it hard to believe.

Yet it seems to me the way I've told it is the way it all happened. The direction I apparently moved in so persistently was not one I selected, traced out on a map, and followed consciously. One thing led to another, and now, as I look back on it, I'm astounded to see that it had a logical consistency I was not aware of as I lived through it.

I'm not sure whether I'm pleased or chagrined. If I had it to do all over again, I suppose I'd do things differently; one ought to learn *something* in the course of a lifetime. But who knows? Maybe I'd travel the same road in the same way. That would be too much. Once was enough!

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