

Herbert Kaufman: Celebrating a Century of Contributions to Public Administration

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HERBERT KAUFMAN: A CELEBRATION

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In accepting American Society for Public Administration's Dwight Waldo Award in 1996, Herbert Kaufman reflected on his relationships with both the award's namesake and its previous awardee, Herbert Simon. On one hand, Kaufman throughout his career emphasized the strong influence Simon's work on process and efficiency had on his approach to public administration. On the other hand, he deeply appreciated Waldo's efforts to deal with the challenges bureaucracy posed for politics and accountability. Simon and Waldo, he quipped, "presented me with a challenge because I sought to follow both paths." (Kaufman 1996b, ii)

No one in the history of public administration has balanced these competing tugs or perspectives on the field so well. And everyone in public administration has benefited from Kaufman's long, thoughtful, and witty efforts to weigh that balance. The four essays in this roundtable focus on the enduring contributions Herbert Kaufman has made along the way.

Born in New York City on September 21, 1922, Kaufman attended the City College of New York, where he found himself intrigued by courses that focused on the role of the civil service in implementing public policies. With a career in bureaucracy in mind, he began graduate work in political science at Columbia University, but after just one semester, he was drafted into the armed forces as part of the mobilization for the Second World War. After serving three years in the infantry, Kaufman returned to Columbia where, with the support of the GI Bill and a research position in Luther Gulick's Institute of Public Administration (IPA), he honed the analytical, research, and writing skills that proved the hallmark of his work for the next seven decades. As Donald Kettl notes in the opening essay, what once intrigued him as a student soon developed into a lifelong effort to find answers to some of the field's central questions.

Kaufman is perhaps best known for *The forest ranger*, which became a classic for its crisp and clear case study of administrative behavior. In their contribution to this roundtable,

Norma Riccucci and Melvin Dubnick explore Kaufman's aspirations for the role of case studies in advancing the administrative sciences, as well as for how it continues to serve as a model for qualitative ethnographic research in the social sciences.

Much of Kaufman's work also demonstrates that significant—even groundbreaking—insights can be expressed in clear and lively prose. He demonstrated this in widely read journal articles, many of which have become part of the public administration canon. But his skill in weaving a lively argument about the issues of public administration is most evident in his 100-page masterpiece, *Red tape: Its origins, uses and abuses*. In her contribution to the roundtable, Leisha DeHart-Davis shows how that work laid the "intellectual foundation" for what would become a major subfield in the study of public administration and governance.

For William Resh, Kaufman's research on administrative behavior shows how a wide variety of approaches, rather than a narrow orthodoxy, can fundamentally enrich the field. This heterodoxy, he argues, is an invaluable bridge among the many approaches that have struggled for the heart of the field.

Kaufman's sweeping research career stretches far beyond the topics discussed in this roundtable. For example, his co-authored book with Wallace Sayre, *Governing New York city: Politics in the metropolis* (1960, 1965), is notable as the "most detailed and comprehensive analysis of the city's government ever written," according to Robert Caro, himself a masterful storyteller about the transformation of New York (Caro 1974, 745–746)—a study that gave "manageable ordering" to an extremely complex subject (Long et al. 1961, 25).

Moreover, in other works Kaufman explored, in an especially prophetic way, the "cycle of values" that constantly bring about changes in how we approach the role of the bureaucracy in American democracy (Kaufman 1956, 1969, 1981b). Kaufman capped his career with *Time, chance, and organizations* (1985, 1991), a work that offers a theoretical lens through which to view his previous works. An exploration of these contributions, as well as a synthesis of Kaufman's

remarkable insights into the broader tensions between the politics and efficiency of public administration, will provide ample room for the exploration of future scholars.

Indeed, a full appreciation of Herbert Kaufman's contributions to public administration requires more than an assessment of individual works. It would demand, as well as a careful look at how he went about his work, the uncommon grace and remarkable humor that characterized his writing.

Almost all of Kaufman's work has a somewhat apologetic tone. He is invariably meticulous in his research, but he is also quick to warn readers about the limitations and shortcomings of each study. In addressing critics, he frequently shoulders the blame for any misunderstandings, although some of those apologies serve more as a mirror held up to the arguments of his detractors. He is always quick, however, to respond to criticisms that he believes to be unfair, often with a wry eye (see Kaufman 1975, 536–537; also Kaufman 2017).

Kaufman has long held the admiration of scholars in the field, especially about *The forest ranger*. For Larry Lutton (2007), the work exemplified “some of the best aspects of its author, giving us insight into why he has had such a successful and respected career” (168). For Laurence E. Lynn, Jr., “Herbert Kaufman—the man, the scholar, and the author of a revered book—has become, himself, a classic of public administration” (2016, 121). Nothing could better sum up Herbert Kaufman's contributions to public administration—the author of classics with remarkably enduring power, and a giant whose career in and of itself is a classic.

DISCOVERY THROUGH SURPRISE: TAGGING ALONG ON A LIFETIME OF CONTRIBUTIONS

Donald F. Kettl

In musing about his remarkable career, Herbert Kaufman noted that “some fortunate people hear the music of the spheres,” a notion created by the ancient Greeks that held celestial spheres emit their own special kind of music, which could be sensed only with the soul. In contrast, he wrote, “I seem to have hearkened to less celestial strains” (1996a, 127). He had spent a lifetime studying public administration.

That had not been his original plan. From his grade school days, he had been intent on becoming a lawyer. In those days, like today, the best road seemed to be a major in political science. The subject was “tedious,” he remembered, but he put up with it because that was the road down which law school admissions ran. After all, “Nobody said it was supposed to be fun” (1996a, 127).

From Walter Sharp, who was enticed to move from the University of Wisconsin to the City College of New York to transform the Department of Government, Herbert Kaufman took a course in public administration. And that turned out to be fun. “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,” he recalled later (1996a, 128). Shaped by interactions with a truly remarkable collection of researchers, including especially Herbert A. Simon as he wrote the first edition of *Administrative behavior* (1947), Kaufman put aside his father's career in law and committed himself completely to both the study and practice of public administration.

Along the way, Kaufman charted some of the most important work of post-Second World War public administration.

There were nine books, led by *The forest ranger* (1960) and capped by *Time, chance, and organizations* (1985), and a wide range of articles, including most notably “Emerging Conflicts in the Doctrines of Public Administration” (1956). Together, they weave important links between public administration and political science.

That connection, in fact, is one of the most important contributions of Kaufman's remarkable career. In the 1950s, he and Yale colleague James W. Fesler explored the possibility of creating a professional program for career training in public administration, but outside the Department of Political Science, where they both had appointments. They had been hearing from the university's alumni in Washington about the need for students well-versed in the practice of administration. As was so often the case, Kaufman and Fesler's instinct for cutting-edge puzzles was right on target. They anticipated the creation of a new generation of public policy programs by Harvard, Berkeley, and Texas, among other universities.

They carefully explored the issue and concluded that “public administration and political science are intellectually inseparable” and that “more would be lost than gained by dividing them from one another organizationally” (1996a, 137). Much of the rest of the field came to disagree with them, including Yale itself, which created its School of Organization and Management in 1973 (and renamed it the School of Management in 1994). Indeed, SOM became known simply as “Yale's business school.”

He established himself as a leading scholar in the Yale Department of Political Science, at a time it housed other luminaries like Robert A. Dahl and Charles E. Lindblom and trained doctoral students like Aaron Wildavsky, Raymond E. Wolfinger, and Theodore J. Lowi. But after 16 years in New Haven, he and his wife, Ruth, made the difficult decision to leave New Haven. “I had begun to feel I was growing stale as a teacher,” he remembered later (1996a, 135), a notion that anyone who ever knew him would find impossible to believe.

More fundamentally, he decided to focus more directly on “the theory and behavior of government organizations.” For that, he said, “Washington was the place for me to be” (1996a, 135). So, he and his wife Ruth packed up and moved to Washington to take a position as senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. That ignited one of the most prolific and influential periods of any public administration scholar of the last century.

He published *The limits of organizational change* (1971), followed by four important books from Brookings, namely *Administrative feedback* (1973), *Are government organizations immortal?* (1976), *Red tape* (1977), and *The administrative behavior of federal bureau chiefs* (1981a). These books were not only remarkable for the keen insight of the questions they asked (are government organizations immortal?) but also for the simple power of the answers they provided (yes).

He became the master of the short book. *Red tape*, at just 100 pages, is quite simply a masterpiece. He worked his way through these issues with an uncommon instinct for engaging government managers. The constant revelation in his books is not only his insight into what makes government tick but is also that this insight so often—and sometimes surprisingly to him—rings true.

In looking back over such an illustrious career, the natural question is how he planned it. That is a puzzle important to those who would want to follow in his footsteps—and a matter of fundamental curiosity to him as well. One cannot

examine the development of his projects without being struck by the tremendous power of his work and the conclusion that there surely must have been a grand strategy that shaped it.

In fact, Kaufman explains, much of what developed was the product of chance: his undergraduate course with Walter Sharp in public administration; his encounter with Herbert Simon and a lunchtime conversation that followed; the encouragement of Luther Gulick to tackle a dissertation on an arcane topic like the US Forest Service; his stumble into teaching at City College, which led to an opportunity at Yale; and then the doors that opened at Brookings. The boy who wanted to be a lawyer and did not find political science much fun, discovered a knack for seizing lucky opportunities at the most fortunate times.

Of course, even a casual paging through his work demonstrates quite clearly that his amazing contributions are the product of much more than luck. His genius is more than happenstance, even if his typically self-deprecating tales might make it seem that way.

For those seeking traces into Kaufman's career, the foremost clue comes from what he calls "the sense of discovery" (1996a, 133) that drove him. He discovered that political science was fun when it drove his insatiable curiosity and the quest for answering the big questions of public administration. He had an instinct for coupling that quest with a sense of where the good data might lie. That data, in turn, often rested with those who did the government's work in ways he so much admired.

But even if "chance plays a large part in everyone's life," including his own, as he wrote (1996a, 138), there remains the underlying question of what holds the work together. As he looked back on his career, he found himself "astounded to see that it had a logical consistency I was not aware of as I lived through it" (1996a, 138). That logical consistency, of course, could only be explained by his instincts, research skills, and writing talents that spun big questions into convincing answers.

He played a thought experiment with himself: If he had to do it all over again, would the result be any different? After all, he hopes he has managed to learn something through his life. "But who knows?" he wrote in answering his own question. "Maybe I would end up traveling the same road in the same way—and being as surprised the second time as I was the first" (1996a, 138).

That playfulness is the mark of someone who genuinely has had fun with the career he has chosen—or, perhaps more accurately, with the ride he has taken through the great puzzles connecting political science and public administration. The discipline is surely far richer for the chance to ride along with him, as are future generations of students with the opportunity to share the same sense of discovery.

THE FOREST RANGER AND THE CASE STUDY: ASPIRATION AND ACCOMPLISHMENT

Norma M. Riccucci

Melvin J. Dubnick

Among those who have devoted their careers to the study of public administration, there is a general agreement that Herbert Kaufman's *The forest ranger* (1960) deserves the appellation of a "classic" in our field.

The forest ranger (hereafter *TFR*) is, among other things, regarded as an exemplar for sound qualitative work in a field

where, as Larry Luton (2007) points out, "the case study is one of the most often used research approaches." But its status as a classic in our field also involves its role as a precursor to major research programs that emerged from the field public administration years later. "Although the term 'street-level bureaucrat' was not in common currency" argues R.A.W. Rhodes, Kaufman "pioneered the topic" two decades before Michael Lipsky laid the foundation for the study of face-to-face contact with clients of state services (Rhodes 2015, 172).

In his "Foreword" to the 2006 reprint edition of *TFR*, Richard Nathan highlighted the connection of the work to the establishment of implementation studies, taking note that Aaron Wildavsky was a student of Kaufman during his years at Yale (Nathan 2006, xvii). The work's influence is such that it received special attention in James Q. Wilson's *Bureaucracy*, a classic in its own right, as "perhaps the best-known of a government agency trying to manage the behavior of operative working in remote places" (Wilson 1989, 166; cited by Nathan 2006, xvii). On a more normative note, Philip K. Howard credits *TFR* with having provided us with a "guided discretion" model of governance where public "officials are judged not by their mindless compliance or other objective metrics but by a broader view of their effectiveness" (Howard 2015, xiii).

But more than any other legacy, Kaufman's decision to apply a case study approach in his examination of the US Forest Service has emerged over the years as the major rationale for its status as a classic contribution to the study of government. It was as if he had decided to rely on a "conservative and underconceptualized" approach to the study of administrative behavior despite the methodological pressures being generated by the behavioral and positivist movements in the field (see Lynn 2016, 118–119). "Ultimately," contends Jason Burton in a 2012 review, "it may be that *The Forest Ranger* is, first and foremost, of value as an example of how to conduct a case study" (Burton 2012, 625).

The image of *TFR* as a brilliantly crafted case study, however, may obscure what Kaufman intended in his use of the case study method when he first adopted the approach in the late 1940s. In what follows, we offer a brief narrative focused on the story behind the study that highlights the circumstances and methodological choices he made while conducting his fieldwork on the forest service for both his 1950 dissertation and the eventual publication of the book in 1960. In addition, we explore his emerging views on the role case studies can and should play in advancing the science of public administration, if only the potential value of the case method was taken seriously by the field's leaders. Our objective is not merely to honor the status of *TFR* for what it represents to the field, but to offer an appreciation of what Kaufman hoped the study might accomplish.

The Making of a Masterpiece

After returning to civilian life after three years in the Army, Kaufman completed his Master of Arts degree at Columbia in 1946,¹ and the next year was awarded research funding

¹His masters thesis, focused on the hotly debated Federal Administrative Procedure Act, was published in the Boston University Law Review (Kaufman 1946) and was accompanied by an editorial note acknowledging that while some readers might disagree with the author's "speculations" regarding the Act's impact and his "personal opinions as to the desirability of such legislation," the article warranted publication given the "great value" of its "factual analysis and collection of materials."

from the IPA in New York City, which (along with the GI Bill) allowed him to take doctoral courses at Columbia University. At the time, the Institute was engaged in a study of forestry, whereas Kaufman was not interested in forest policy as a substantive matter, he recognized that he could study administrative decision making in the forestry service in a way that could complement the Institute's work (Kaufman 1996a). This decision was the genesis of his dissertation (completed in 1950), which would eventually become his seminal book.² As he would note years later, from the outset, his primary focus was "on organizational problems and relationships illuminated by Forest Service experience rather than on the agency per se; the Forest Service is essentially a 'specimen' for examination" (Kaufman 1967, xiii).³

In that sense, the decision to study the Forest Service was less significant than his decision to apply a case study approach to his subject. In an appendix to the dissertation, Kaufman ruminated about the value and significance of case studies in public administration research. The case method, he wrote, "clearly makes possible the discovery and analysis of factors that must inevitably go unnoticed in broader surveys. It ... brings these forces to light, supplementing the knowledge we get from the extensive investigation. But there is still a long way to go in public administration before all the benefits of the case method become fully apparent. First, there must be many more case studies; by itself, the individual case is suggestive but never conclusive. Secondly, the techniques of administrative analysis required for this approach must be refined" (Kaufman 1950, 243).

While the 1950 study (as well as *TFR* a decade later) involved the use of a wide range of what Kaufman later termed "the standard techniques of the political scientist" (Kaufman 1960, 6–7), the earlier work relied much more on available reports, data, and documents generated by IPA's research team than on Kaufman's "fieldwork" at the District Ranger level. As part of the Institute's research team, he did have considerable access to staff reports that "shed a good deal of light on the practices of the Forest Service as they affected operations" at the field level, but he was given the opportunity to conduct more intensive research in only one of the 753 District offices.

For Kaufman, the fieldwork and the "intensive interview" was central to conducting a credible case study focused on administrative behavior. "The case study may prove barren unless it pursues all ... factors by examining intensively the people and groups involved. The intensive interview is, for this purpose, an indispensable tool" (Kaufman 1950, 251).⁴ When undertaking his research for *TFR* over the next decade,⁵

Kaufman's fieldwork had expanded to five Ranger Districts, and he explicitly adopted the ethnographic research approach of cultural anthropologists as his guiding model. "Within the limits of time and resources available, and recognizing the dangers of confusing superficially similar research activities with identity of method, the researcher adopted a pattern of data gathering that followed, albeit distantly, the anthropological pattern" (Kaufman 1960, 7).

Kaufman's comments on his method does beg the question of whether he was engaged in an ethnographic study rather than a case study, and if so, what does the "difference" imply about *TFR*'s status as a model to be emulated? "Given the intellectual climate of the times," writes Roderick Rhodes, "it would be hard for Kaufman to claim he was a practicing ethnographer...." And yet "ethnography is immersive fieldwork and that is what he did. After all, he stayed in the home of some rangers. That's immersive."⁶ Nor was Kaufman's admiration for the work of cultural anthropology restricted to his study of the Forest Service; two decades later, he would note that the methods he applied in his study of Federal Bureau Chiefs (Kaufman 1981a) was "akin to the techniques of cultural anthropologists, who have long been aware that holistic observation, despite its shortcomings, yields insights and information other approaches cannot produce" (12).⁷

Aspirations for the Case Study Approach

The story behind the writing of *TFR* would be incomplete if it did not include Kaufman's aspirations for the case study approach. In all his recounting and acknowledgements regarding *TFR*, he notes the strong influence of Herbert Simon's *Administrative Behavior* (1947):

Right after the war I became a behavioralist, and I've been one all my life ... I've been devoted to behavioralism following Herb Simon. So I think I've been trying to put a behavioralist spin on administrative behavior.... It didn't do much good...⁸

From the outset Kaufman was on a mission to contribute to the administrative science movement that emerged from Simon's work (see Kaufman 1996a). For many in the field who regard Simon's "science" perspective as anathema to the kind of qualitative work reflected in the widespread use of case studies, the connection of *TFR* to Simon's behavioralism seems disconcerting. Nevertheless, he sought (and received) Simon's advice throughout his IPA research and Simon's influence is evident in many of Kaufman's later writings.⁹

Kaufman's aspirations for the role of case studies in the emerging administrative science is evident in his dissertation. Kaufman maintained that, over time, more case studies would be conducted in the field, and this would lead to additional, improved case studies. In terms of refining the techniques of analysis, Kaufman observed that progress would not be made

²The title of his dissertation was "Field Man in Administration: How the Administrative Behavior of a District Ranger is Influenced Within and by the United States Forest Service." It can be accessed at <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/field-man-administration-how-administrative/docview/301813897/se-2>.

³The IPA's forestry project generated many studies and reports, which provided the basis for Luther Gulick's (1951) publication, "American Forest Policy." Among the book's reviewers, John Gaus (1952) and Charles Hardin (1952) praised the insights and analysis, and both took special note of work's attention to the implementation of forest policy in a highly fragmented federal system—with particular attention to the role played by administrative professionals. Although not explicitly acknowledged, Kaufman's fieldwork obviously had an impact.

⁴Kaufman follows this statement with 10 pages of rules he tried to adhere while conducting such interviews. The result is nothing less than an essential guide to interviewing. See Kaufman (1950, 251–261).

⁵As indicated by other essays in the collection, although at least a decade separated his work on the dissertation and publication of *TFR*, Kaufman was quite busy on other projects—several of them regarded as classics in their own right.

⁶Roderick Rhodes, Personal communication, June 21, 2022.

⁷Kaufman's (1981a) study of administrative chiefs is regarded by Rhodes and Corbett as a "pioneering example" of naturalistic ethnography in the study of the executive. See Rhodes and Corbett (2020, 116).

⁸Herbert Kaufman, Personal (telephone) communication, March 12, 2022.

⁹A cursory exploration of Simon's archives at Carnegie Mellon demonstrates that the respect was mutual. Over the years, when he received an invitation to provide a contribution to a journal or to deliver a keynote address that he would not be able to accept, Simon would often suggest Kaufman as an alternative. See Simon (1940–2001).

unless “the researchers making the surveys take pains to describe the method by which they arrive at their results. There is a tendency in the social sciences to pretest data without explaining how they are gathered. Actually, any case study is as much a test of the method as of the presentation, and it would probably be of great value to subsequent researchers if each report contained a note on method” (Kaufman 1950, 243–244).

Although *TFR* does not include an extended discussion of the case study method per se, in its final pages, Kaufman addresses how he hopes “the mode of description” used in the research will contribute to the “study of administration.” There he highlights how his inquiries focused on administrative relationships “brings to light a few factors in administration not previously known...” and helps “merge in analysis” material drawn from textbooks with how they operate in real life. Through this approach, the “materials of public administration come together in an organic unity with what have hitherto been discrete bodies of literature” drawn from other disciplines. In addition, he regards the work as useful in the comparative study of administration where the focus is on problem of administrative fragmentation generated by “centrifugal forces” found in all cultures (Kaufman 1960, 239–240).

As to the future of the case study approach (as he applied it), he sees the “next step” as the assemblage of related studies that can offer a “catalogue of centrifugal tendencies and of modes of integration in an effort to determine under what conditions each of them occurs, and when each of the latter is successful.... Ultimately, such studies, in conjunction with others, might contribute to the formulation of a general theory of organization, and permit us to progress from administrative description to soundly based administrative prescription” (Kaufman 1960, 240–241).

But to fully grasp Kaufman’s aspirations for the case study approach, we rely on a review essay he published in *PAR* in 1958. Titled “The Next Step in Case Studies,” he begins with a survey of 15 studies added to The Inter-University Case Program (ICP) between 1954 and 1957. He spends the first six pages of the essay assessing the cases as to style and content, praising most of them and stressing that even those lacking in both regards “are more interesting than most textbook treatments of public administration...” (Kaufman 1958, 54). He follows those comments with a section highlighting the positive contributions the ICP has been making to the “enrichment of the study of public administration” (55), but follows this with a sharp critique of the ICP’s inability—or unwillingness—to develop a credible research program centered on the case study approach.

He begins by noting how all 39 cases (24 in the first series and the 15 being reviewed) supported one thesis: “that administration is interaction among groups and individuals...” While more recent cases reconfirm that thesis “many times over,” the ICP has failed to foster case studies that address the wide range of questions being generated by the field. Yes, cases are important as instructional tools, but they can and should play an important part in expanding the knowledge base of public administration. Kaufman pointedly charges the ICP with “dereliction” in this regard. On the many under researched “propositions and questions” being raised in the field, “many of which antedate the case program, the cases shed little light. Instead of helping us validate the former and

answer the latter (which *only* the case method can do!), they enlarge the number of untested declarations and unresolved questions with which our discipline already abounds, And this, I submit, is derelict” (Kaufman 1958, 56; emphasis in original).

Kaufman then turns his attention to how the ICP can “realize its potential” by changing its case selection process to support cases chosen “for purposes of testing-hypotheses,” and to assess submissions to assure that they “conform as closely as we can make them to the classic formulations of the canons of scientific proof.” Within this framework, the legacy of the ICP would “a series of tested propositions” rather than just a collection of interesting studies. “The method would become accretive and probative as it now is not and cannot be. It would be systematic and disciplined where there is now a large element of chance in its choice of material” (Kaufman 1958, 57–58).

Kaufman acknowledges that adoption of his proposed changes would require “a number of acts of faith,” including a “belief in the cumulateness of human knowledge about society, a point of view about the social sciences upon which... history casts many serious doubts” (59). The changes he calls for would also rely on the comparability of cases, the credibility of the ICP case selection process, the criteria applied in selecting on which hypotheses to focus research resources. In a tone that can only be read as resignation, he acknowledges that his faith in such conditions might be misplaced, and if so, “we shall be no worse off than we are now—indeed we shall be better off, for we shall at last be fairly sure that this road leads nowhere, and we shall have at the same time have many cases for class use as we would have had under any circumstances” (59).

“It Didn’t Do Much Good”—Or Has It?

Given Kaufman’s status in the field as well as the major place of *TFR* in the discipline’s canon, it is difficult to imagine him as a committed behavioralist whose major aspirations for the case study method have been dashed. Rather, among the many contributions he is noted for, it is his design and use of the case study method in *TFR* that stands out, and it is often regarded as a foundational counterpoint to the very Simon-inspired administrative science approach he attempted to advance.

To an extent, Kaufman has only himself to blame for this paradoxical situation. His openness to applying both quantitative and quantitative methods adapted from other social science disciplines was clearly established in his dissertation. There he states that there are “aspects of organization that are more susceptible of qualitative than quantitative analysis. In order to broaden the knowledge of organization, new tools must be found to help the researcher get at these intangible, elusive elements” (Kaufman 1950, 262). He then suggests that we look to the qualitative administrative analyses in such disciplines as anthropology, psychology, sociology, and social psychology. “These sciences” he goes on to say, “placing heavy emphasis on individual human beings and their relationships with one another, can make an inestimable contribution to the study of administration” (Kaufman 1950, 262).

Even the most cursory survey of the field’s roots will reflect the fact that public administration has multidisciplinary origins. But in the past few decades, the field seems to have lost sight of its roots, and it is only recently that academics have

been calling for multidisciplinary as well as transdisciplinary approaches, looking to other disciplines to guide their research, from theory to methods (see, e.g., [Blessett 2020](#); [Franklin et al. 2019](#); [Haverland and Yanow 2012](#); [Rodgers and Rodgers 2000](#)). Kaufman's work on *TFR* reminds us that there was a time when the field's relationship to other social science disciplines was strong and effectively put to use to create a true classic.

A number of sound, robust case studies in the tradition of *The Forest Ranger* have followed over the last several decades, which have helped to build theory and knowledge in the field of public administration (see, e.g., [Gormley 1992](#); [Kunioka and Woller 1999](#); [Lambright 2019](#)). Add to this the volumes of work related to street-level bureaucracies, implementation studies, and workplace studies, and you begin to get a sense of the legacy associated with *TFR*.¹⁰ Thus, Kaufman's *The forest ranger* remains a timeless masterpiece and will continue to influence and guide students and scholars on how to conduct strong, rigorous qualitative research in the form of case studies, which continue to be the most popular method for qualitative research in the field ([Ospina, Esteve, and Lee 2018](#)).

KAUFMAN AND ADMINISTRATIVE "RED TAPE"

Leisha De-Hart Davis

Kaufman has also influenced public administration research and theory with his seminal work on *Red tape: Its origins, uses and abuses*. First published in 1977, this slim volume represents the first intellectual consideration of a topic that until then lacked conceptual articulation. To Kaufman, red tape is an umbrella term encompassing a wide range of administrative dysfunctions, namely excessive constraints, irrelevant, duplicative, and unnecessary paperwork, inertia, and delayed decisions to name just the few. Red tape arises from noble social goals, such as the desire to protect people from harm (think unsafe food, consumer fraud, environmental hazards), to alleviate the distress of intractable social problems such as poverty and to prevent implosions of the economic and political system. The multiplicity of values embedded in social goals, combined with a staggering array of diverse interests seeking attention, lead to mountains of red tape. While government reformists routinely seek out red tape remedies—such as making government smaller or decentralizing power to the states—Kaufman finds them largely ineffective. Only chipping away at specific forms of red tape over time will give partial relief. As Kaufman argues, we will never be rid of red tape in its entirety because it is the cost of living in a democracy.

Kaufman foretold elements of the original theory of red tape, introduced in a journal article by Barry Bozeman in 1993 and then elaborated upon in his 2000 book *Bureaucracy and red tape*. Kaufman's chapter "The Object of Loathing" maps out the different ways that red tape manifests itself. In just a few

illustrations, Kaufman enumerated the costs of administrative processes in a variety of settings, from giant pharmaceutical firms to small businesses to individual taxpayers; this exercise portended Bozeman's notion of compliance requirements and compliance burden, defined as total resources required and expended to comply with rules. Kaufman argues that red tape is produced partly by the representation of many diverse interests, mirroring Bozeman's negative sum compromise that occurs when rules involve too many stakeholders to achieve rule objectives. Kaufman's contradictory requirements, illustrated by rules governing privacy on one hand and freedom of government information on the other hand, foreshadowed Bozeman's accretion, in which rules accumulate and can become incompatible with one another. Whereas Kaufman argues that individual bureaucrats are red tape scapegoats, Bozeman similarly contends that red tape is a systems problem rather than a people problem. (Sidenote: perceived red tape may indeed be a people problem given research suggesting that centralized decision making and hierarchy are key ingredients of red tape perceptions, [Kaufmann et al. forthcoming](#)). The ideas Kaufman introduced to a wide audience in 1977 provided the foundation for the theoretical concepts that Bozeman introduced to the academy over 15 years later.

Kaufman's argument that red tape is an inherently subjective phenomenon also influenced red tape theory. In *Red tape: its origins, uses and abuses*, he states that "One person's red tape may be another person's treasured procedural safeguard" or "another's sacred protection." This line of thinking preceded the notion of stakeholder red tape, which defines red tape according to the ineffectiveness of rules, regulations, and procedures perceived by different stakeholder groups ([Bozeman 1993](#)). Research in this vein has detected divergent perspectives on red tape between public managers and their contractors ([Feeney and Bozeman 2009](#)), across public employees variably indoctrinated to union values ([Davis 2013](#)), and according to one's hierarchical location in an organization ([Walker and Brewer 2008](#)). The concept of multi-dimensional red tape ([Bozeman 2012](#); [Bozeman and Feeney 2011](#)), refines stakeholder red tape by acknowledging that rules can be ineffective for some stakeholder objectives but not others. Under this schema, diagnosing and remedying red tape becomes even more complex as it evaluates rules based on a variety of stakeholder objectives. This research confirms Kaufman's portrait of red tape as complex and difficult to disentangle, driven by a multiplicity of interests and motivations, and inherently subjective in its appraisal.

Consistent with his portrayal of red tape as inherently subjective, Kaufman also argues that red tape is best measured as *perceived*. While he provides a range of objective data to inform his red tape arguments, citing pages of paperwork and hours of compliance requirements for regulatory tasks, he contends that people interpret the reasonableness of bureaucratic requirements versus the value of their purposes before attacking government on red tape grounds. Building on this realization, subsequent red tape research has relied heavily on perceptual measures of red tape, gathered primarily through organizational surveys. Research based on such surveys has predicted a wide range of behaviors in response to red tape perceptions, including lower creativity ([Feeney and DeHart-Davis 2009](#)), reduced public service motivation ([Moynihan and Pandey 2007](#)), and dampened employee morale ([DeHart-Davis and Pandey 2005](#); [George et al. 2021](#); [Steijn and van der Voet 2019](#)). At the organizational level,

¹⁰While no longer pursuing his advocacy of a research program based on the case study method, Kaufman remains defensive when it comes to criticisms of *TFR*. His last published work was a commentary in *PAR*, responding to [Fleischman's \(2017\)](#) charge that Kaufman's classic was flawed because it did not pay sufficient attention to the political context. In his rebuttal, Kaufman wrote that it "is not quite accurate to allege that I completely ignored the political setting of the Forest Service," and he goes on to explain that he had "set a circumscribed goal for my study," which was not "to evaluate the policies of the Forest Service but to describe the way those policy aspirations were translated into concrete actions in the field" ([Kaufman 2017](#), 752).

shared perceptions of red tape have been linked to interest in new technologies (Pandey and Bretschneider 1997) and even performance (Brewer and Walker 2010a, 2010b; Kauffman et al. 2019). Thus, Kaufman's contention that perceived red tape elicits behavioral responses holds up in an array of settings.

In addition to laying the intellectual foundation for the red tape literature, Kaufman's red tape also provides a point of departure. To illustrate, Kaufman construes red tape as the pernicious side effects of administrative processes that (sometimes) achieve worthy social goals. Bozeman, by contrast, defines red tape as a dysfunctional bureaucratic process: red tape does not achieve its intended goals and, as such, cannot produce positive social outcomes. From Bozeman's perspective, bad intentions may drive red tape; consider self-aggrandizement, in which public officials seek to flex their power muscles by creating needless procedural requirements. Kaufman dismisses self-aggrandizement as a red tape source based on the constraints it places on public officials, while Bozeman cites self-aggrandizement as one way the good rules can be "born bad," inherently flawed from the get-go. Kaufman considers red tape to be normal and inevitable, while Bozeman construes red tape as a pathology to be diagnosed and treated.

Along with his influence on red tape research, Kaufman's ideas also paved the way for green tape research. The green tape concept was devised in 2009 by DeHart-Davis to capture the precursors and consequences of effective organizational rules, defined as those that serve their intended organizational purposes. In the green tape framework, characteristics of rule design and implementation, such as whether a rule is written consistently applied or optimally controlling, determine a rule's effectiveness (DeHart-Davis 2017). Where Kaufman argued that red tape produces positive social outcomes, DeHart-Davis focuses on effective organizational rules and their social contributions. From Kaufman's perspective, red tape enables the state to be compassionate and representative of a wide range of interests. DeHart-Davis, focusing on organizational rules and their benefits, argues that green tape levels the organizational playing field by subjecting all organization members to rule requirements, increasing the likelihood of fair outcomes for organization members, and protecting against the arbitrary and capricious managerial action. Like Bozeman, DeHart-Davis departs from Kaufman's argument that ineffective administrative process can deliver positive social goals; green tape theory asserts that positive social outcomes arise only from effective administrative process. Subsequent green tape research suggests that when organization members perceive the presence of green tape attributions, they are more likely to follow rules (Borri, et al. 2018), have higher job satisfaction (DeHart-Davis et al. 2015), and lower turnover intentions (Kauffman et al. forthcoming).

In summary, the ancestral lineages of red and green tape scholarship clearly trace back to Herbert Kaufman's *Red tape: Its origins, uses and abuses*. His construction of red tape as a subjective phenomenon launched a generation of red tape theory and research using perceptual measures in organizational survey. Stakeholder red tape flows directly from Kaufman's argument that "one person's red tape may be another person's treasured procedural safeguard." So, do core elements of red tape theory, such as compliance burden, negative sum compromise, and accretion. Kaufman's red tape thinking also undergirds green tape theory, in that bureaucratic processes can be socially beneficial. From both red and

green tape perspectives, Kaufman laid the groundwork for a generation of research on organizational rules that figure prominently into public administration scholarship today.

FOR EMBRACING THE HETERODOXY: THE IMITABLE PERSPECTIVE OF HERBERT KAUFMAN

William G. Resh

In recent years, a debate has (re)surfaced in the scholarly field of public administration regarding the emergence of self-identifying "behavioral public administration" (BPA) and whether it forsakes the importance of institutions (see Bertelli and Riccucci 2022; Bertelli et al. 2022; Moynihan 2018; Roberts 2020). BPA is "the interdisciplinary analysis of public administration from the micro-level perspective of individual behavior and attitudes by drawing on recent advances in our understanding of the underlying psychology and behavior of individuals and groups," at least according to its most cited definition (Grimmelikhuijsen et al. 2017, 46). This definition would probably not strike an older observer of the field as a revolutionary development in public administration research. Behavioral science has influenced public administration across an array of sub-areas for some time, especially decision making, performance management, public engagement, conflict management, and leadership, to name just a few.

BPA stems from the seminal work of Herbert Simon, Miriam Roher, James March, and—yes—Herbert Kaufman who argued (whether implicitly or explicitly) that an empirical understanding of organizations (and management) begins by observing the individuals that comprise them. Arguably, its roots precede this, where progenitors of the Scientific Management movement of the Progressive period were, in essence, behaviorists. And the *modus operandi* for a good portion of self-professed public administration research scholars, and for scholars who contribute even indirectly to the field, has been to empirically assess the behavior of individual administrators, members of the public, or any organizational stakeholders as the units of analysis. Moreover, the assumptions made regarding the motivation and behavior of firms and institutions in self-professed "institutional" views of public administration begin with assumptions grounded at the micro-foundations of human behavior regarding individuals, their motivations, and their psychology (Jilke et al. 2019).

Public administration—as a *field*—has always wrestled with tensions among the art, science, and practice of management (Lynn 1996), existential crises of disciplinization (Ostrom 1974), disciplinary turf battles, and the incentives of the industrialized academic enterprise that encourage balkanization and specialization. In doing so, the field has arguably exacerbated focal divides and potentially undermined its own position to speak to critical issues of governmental legitimacy and crisis (Milward et al. 2016). In the meantime, however, our conferences, national and international trade organizations, and journals proliferate. The impact factors of our journals and the sophistication of our empirics continuously increase. Our schools become larger and more prosperous. It is neither rigor that lacks nor resources.

Despite these markers of success, however, it is less likely now than ever that public administration scholars (at least in the United States) are actively engaging with others outside their own contributing discipline to the field. In other

words, we continue as a *field* (i.e., public administration) for the purpose of organizing work around particular social phenomena and institutions, but we are diffused by our *disciplinary* orientations (e.g., political science, sociology, social psychology, economics). And a lack of integration among these disciplines can prevent the adaptation, innovation, risk-taking, and creativity that were exemplified by Herbert Kaufman's career.

In taking account of Kaufman's many important contributions, it provides us an opportunity to assess where we stand currently as a scholarly community in terms of our legacy, our intellectual genealogy, and our place within the social sciences generally.

Indeed, Herbert Kaufman's research and writings embodied the heterodoxy that is our scholarly community. While a renowned faculty member at Yale's political science department, Kaufman could have easily found his place in their school of management or their social psychology program. But Kaufman remained a self-identifying public administration scholar. As such, he represents the integrative challenges that beset our field. Public administration has embraced a heterodoxy since its founding. One cannot understand adequately public *management* without understanding *politics*, without understanding *organizations*, without understanding *policy*, without understanding *human behavior*. But in assessing Kaufman's contributions, one cannot help but reflect on the current state of public administration research as a field that suffers from balkanization—one that is divided into schools of management or policy or political science departments. Indeed, it is a development in the field and practice of administrative reform that Kaufman so intuitively warned us against in his inaugural Gaus lecture at the American Political Science Association's 1986 annual meeting—a lament he originally articulated in 1956 (Nechemias 1986).

In taking account of Kaufman's many contributions to our understanding of administrative behavior (indeed, the term "administrative behavior" is in the titles of his two most famous treatises), one would be pressed not to tie his contributions to BPA or the importance of social psychology and organizational behavior as contributing disciplines to the field of public administration. But to do so gives short shrift to the importance of Herbert Kaufman's career as a public administration scholar, a breadth of impact reflected by the essays in this roundtable. In fact, to corner Kaufman's contributions to a single discipline risks diminishing the importance of our academic enterprise as he so capably exemplified it. Herbert Kaufman's overarching contribution to our field was defining it through his embrace of multiple but cognate disciplines that contribute to the general understanding, profession, and field of public administration writ large. His contributions to behavioralism were made specifically because he wanted to understand the extent to which "policy aspirations were translated into concrete actions in the field" (Kaufman 2017, 752) or how the institutional rivalries of political institutions influenced executive autonomy (Kaufman 1981a).

So, when taking account of Kaufman's contributions, it leads one to ponder public administration's standing as a field in the social sciences and the extent to which we have currently the intellectual leadership of scholars like Herbert Kaufman—scholars who embrace the heterodoxy of public administration, scholars who transparently borrow and apply insights from cognate areas of study (or disciplines), scholars

who are capable and accountable jugglers of the art and science of governance (Radin 2002).

Such an assessment should not be taken as a screed or an attempt to injure our incredible enterprise or the people who contribute to it now or before. To reflect on the extent to which Hebert Kaufman provided us intellectual leadership in the form of his mastery and appreciation for the heterodox, diverse, and multiple disciplines that contribute to the art and science of public administration, we too can celebrate the scholarship of the many others that are tied to his legacy. At the same time, we can take account of the dangers inherent to increased balkanization and specialization (as opposed to an integration) of disciplinary perspectives. And the dangers are tangible.

The study of public administration involves understanding the individuals who occupy positions of legal authority within organizations that carry out and define the objectives of democratic governance. But, as a basis of that understanding, one must also explicitly comprehend that legal authority and its implications to the rights of individuals both within and external to the institution. Such a command is critical to a robust democracy. The tensions that emerge between technocratic and democratic authority are many, and these tensions pervade political discourse across modern societies to this day.

Whether one's respective influences are rooted in social psychology or political science or sociology or anthropology or economics, whether one's focus is on the micro-level of the individual or the meso-level of organizations, there remains an urgent and pertinent place for institutional thinkers, for those who "think institutionally" about the implications of their work (Heclo 2008)—particularly now and particularly in public administration. From the largest to the oldest democracies, the rise of ethnocentric nationalism through populist platforms rejects the traditional liberal democratic conceit and a professionalized civil service. Answers from our ranks to defending the liberal order (i.e., protecting the rights of the individual, the enshrinement of those rights in law and action) and assessing the role of the administrative state within that order will not come from just one disciplinary perspective of administration.

But the misguided pursuit of scientism, disciplinary identity, or an overt focus on just one disciplinary view will lead us (1) to forsake the very bases of our authority on the subject of "the state" and (2) risk permanently separating ourselves from legitimate roles in arguing for a robust civil service as a bastion of protection for liberal democracies. To understand these tensions, we must strive for synthetically integrating various perspectives of organizational management, political economy, and human behavior. Therefore, our work and our community of researchers must try to speak to the traditions of political science, administrative and constitutional law, organization theory, and organizational behavior *coherently and collectively*.

The primary focus of scholarship found in the pages of our flagship journals has been on the meso-level of organizational demands and exigencies of one's task environment in the public sector. In other words, public servants have a job to get done, and we are excellent at identifying this and working within that limited frame. Micro-level emphases have centered mostly on the individual motivations of public administrators and how those motivations translate to behaviors, or they focus on specific policy inputs as

behavioral nudges. All of this is incredibly important, but we must reinvigorate a macro-level appreciation for how the political environment in which public administrators are embedded influences their decision making in everyday work or the extent to which a given intervention may lack generalizability to other institutional contexts. Despite criticisms of *TFR* (see Fleischman 2017), Kaufman recognized this as a central challenge (see Kaufman's brief but eloquent 2017 response). Kaufman's empirical focus on individual behavior was intended as an avenue to better understand institutional dynamics. For example, as he explained in his 1981 *Public Administration Review* article, "the best way to identify [the influence of political institutions on policy] is to see the world from the vantage point of senior bureaucrats" (Kaufman 1981, 1981b, 4). Others have since argued that we cannot make a contextually based definition of success in advancing political agendas without the perspective of those responsible for their implementation (Resh 2015).

A cursory review of the scholarship in our leading journals reveals rare attempts to understand how politically charged maneuvers against the *constitutional legitimacy* of the administrative state affect the resilience, capacity, or ethos of our democracy (Resh 2019). Neither do we have an adequate understanding of how political interventions moderate traditional expectations of organizational behavior nor how institutional tensions in a constitutional system (e.g., the United States separation-of-powers system) are perceived by administrators and how these perceptions translate to their work behavior and (most importantly) fundamental policy decisions made within the administrative state. The very founders of the American Political Science Association are those who most would consider to be *public administration* scholars (e.g., Goodnow, Gaus, White), who focused on the structure of government and the reconciliation of the professionalized state to democratic accountability. Indeed, some researchers in our field have shied away from the term Public Administration in lieu of a "Public Management" rebranding to presumably achieve further legitimacy in generic management studies or to genericize public administration as a subfield of management.

Kaufman focused on individuals and their behaviors within organizations not for the purpose of designing behavioral interventions, but to understand and define the constraints on behavior that their institutional setting creates—constraints that inspired James Q. Wilson to further articulate them in his formative treatise (1989). To Kaufman, the very point was to understand the core constitutional and political issues of our day through the lens of the organization and the administrators who occupied it.

By taking a cultural anthropology approach in *The administrative behavior of federal bureau chiefs*, for instance, Kaufman interwove theories from political science and organizational behavior, seeking insights as liberally from administrative law scholars like Kenneth Culp Davis as he did from anthropologists or social psychologists. Kaufman described his research approach as what some social scientists "would not consider science," but he was unconcerned with disciplinary norms. Kaufman was cognizant that all social science requires subjectivity. He saw that "the contribution of every approach, including the less as well as the more rigorous, is needed to build understanding of the phenomena we seek

to describe and explain" (12). He combined direct observation with analysis of administrative records, he combed through legislative records and relevant trade publications, he conducted interviews of not just his focal subjects but the network of individuals with whom they interfaced. He published in administrative law, political science, management, policy, and public administration journals.

Kaufman demonstrated the type of complex and serious research agenda to which we should all aspire. It was one inspired by natural curiosity, not trends. He invested his time and effort in knowing more than showing. He was unconcerned with disciplinary labels. He identified as a public administration scholar because it was the primary topic of his research, but it also presented to him a field that required a multidisciplinary perspective. His work and his approach inspired the likes of Lipsky's *street-level bureaucracy* (1980) and Wilson's *Bureaucracy* (1989) and Feldman's *Order without design* (1989). We are challenged to find their peers today.

Dwight Waldo once wrote that the coherence of public administration as a field will be through "philosophical, disciplinary, and methodological pluralism: continued proliferation of and competition between ideas and approaches in a continuing attempt to survive, adapt, and control change" (244). He argued that for public administration to remain a self-conscious enterprise, it "will not be agreement on some one kit of tools or some one route into the future... Rather, it will be general agreement on the importance of the institutional area of public administration in making a societal transformation" (244). This is the exact motivation that drove Kaufman's career to Brookings and away from the cloistered fiefdoms at Yale. This is the life of the mind that he pursued. A reflection on Herbert Kaufman can be nothing other than a reflection on ourselves because he helped to define the very lifeblood of our enterprise as one that should never suffer the sins of orthodoxy.

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