Oxford Handbooks Online

American Political Development and Political History

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The Oxford Handbook of American Political Development (*Forthcoming*)

Edited by Richard Valelly, Suzanne Mettler, and Robert Lieberman

Online Publication Date: Aug
2014

Subject: Political Science, U.S. Politics, Political Institutions
DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199697915.013.12

Abstract and Keywords

This essay traces the long and productive relationship between two genres of historical writing: American political development (or APD) and American political history. It is written primarily for political scientists; a secondary audience is historians who wish to become more familiar with APD. Its focus is on the period before the adoption of the federal Constitution in 1788 and the end of the Second World War in 1945, an epoch that has long been recognized as not only formative, but also distinct from the epoch that it followed and preceded. It is, in addition, an epoch that has spawned a dialogue between APD and political history that had proved to be particularly fruitful.

Keywords: political history, state-building, state and society, methodology, new institutionalism, historical sociology, early republic, communications

This essay traces the long and productive relationship between two genres of historical writing: American political development (or APD) and American political history. It is written primarily for political scientists; a secondary audience is historians who wish to become more familiar with APD. The first section compares and contrasts APD and political history; the second section is a case study of an influential APD monograph; and the third section briefly highlights some of the areas in which political historians have built on APD to advance their own intellectual agendas. Its focus is on the period before the adoption of the federal Constitution in 1788 and the end of the Second World War in 1945, an epoch that has long been recognized as not only formative, but also distinct from the epoch that it followed and preceded (Keller 2007). It is, in addition, an epoch that has spawned a dialogue between APD and political history that had proved to be particularly fruitful.

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APD is a subfield of political science whose practitioners study the temporal dimensions of governance (Pierson 2004; Orren and Skowronek 2002). It can be divided into two broad genres: historical institutionalism and culturalism (Glenn 2004; Lieberman 2002). This essay will focus on historical institutionalism, the genre in which the relationship between APD and political history has been the most sustained. Institutionalists take governmental institutions as their unit of analysis. Culturalists, in contrast, place more emphasis on ideology and social movements. Influential monographs in the culturalist tradition include Rogers M. Smith's *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U. S. History* (Smith 1997), a wide-ranging critique of the ideological conventions that have shaped the creation of a major legal category in the period between the colonial era and 1912, and David Plotke's *Building a Democratic Political Order: Reshaping American Liberalism in the 1930s and 1940s* (Plotke 1996), an incisive analysis of the influence of social movements on the New Deal coalition.

Many APD practitioners teach in political science or government departments and identify themselves as political scientists. Others were trained as sociologists and identify themselves as sociologists, while a few teach in history departments and identify themselves as historians.

APD presumes that governmental institutions can be agents of change, and that, in certain times and places,

political phenomena can have political causes—as opposed to being a mere byproduct of developments originating in society, culture, or the economy (Pierson 2004; Pierson and Skocpol 2002). While practitioners often undertake detailed empirical research, they are less interested in describing and analyzing a specific event or sequence of events (a preoccupation for many political historians) than in framing analytically fruitful, yet not overly broad, generalizations that illuminate the dynamic workings of the political process.

APD has been aptly characterized as the social science that is closest to political history (Katznelson 2003, 385). Its affinities with political history have been repeatedly affirmed both by social scientists and political historians, and have been the subject of a large body of commentary (Zelizer 2004; Balogh 2003; Katznelson 2003, 2002a,b, 1993). Each field takes as a problematique the relationship between governmental institutions and civic ideals; each is sensitive to temporality, contingency, and sequencing; each defines governmental institutions broadly to include law, federal, federalism, and the configuration of organizations that shape the framing, enactment, and enforcement of public policy; and each is skeptical of grand narratives structured around presidential administrations (the so-called, and oft-derided, “presidential synthesis”). In addition, an influential cohort in each group rejects the misleading presumption that the state can be meaningfully characterized as either strong or weak (Witt, Gerstle, Adams, and Novak 2010; Baldwin 2005) and that political phenomena are best understood as a functional response to industrialization, urbanization, modernization, or some comparably disruptive social transformation.

Historians have long relied on theoretical constructs borrowed from the social sciences. Several of these constructs—including “party systems,” “critical elections,” and “political development”—antedated the emergence of APD. Many derive from modernization theory, a mid-twentieth-century social-scientific framework that emphasized commonalities in time and space. APD is different. By rejecting the presumption that social change followed a single trajectory, and, in particular, by emphasizing the importance for institutional evolution of sequencing (or what is sometimes called “path dependence” or “intercurrence”), it provided historians not only with a new vocabulary—e.g., “state-building,” “administrative capacity,” “bureaucratic autonomy,” “organizational configurations”—but also with a new research agenda.

The theoretical self-awareness of APD has helped political historians transcend the hoary interpretative conventions that have shaped the writing of much U. S. political history. And, in particular, it has provided historians with an alternative to the “presidential synthesis,” a long influential interpretative framework that exaggerated the autonomy of presidential administrations in shaping public policy and overestimated the efficacy of social movements in hastening social reform. “For political historians to truly reconceptualize the study of politics”—opined political historian Julian E. Zelizer in 2004, in a thoughtful review essay that forcefully articulated this position—“they will need to draw on scholarship in political science to think of fresh approaches and frameworks that move beyond the liberal presidential synthesis. If not, we will be stuck with dated frameworks for understanding politics that were crafted several generations ago. The most obvious connection, of course, is that historians will have to keep interacting with scholars in the field of American Political Development who are currently far ahead in this important research” (Zelizer 2004, 129).

APD emerged in the 1980s, a decade during which the study of U. S. political history had largely fallen out of favor in history departments. Early APD landmarks included Stephen Skowronek’s *Building a New American State* (Skowronek 1982); Skocpol’s “Bringing the State Back In” (Skocpol 1985); and Skocpol’s *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers* (Skocpol 1992). Skowronek had been trained as a political scientist at Cornell, where he obtained a PhD in 1979; Skocpol was trained as a sociologist at Harvard, where she obtained a PhD in 1975.

New American State was a thickly layered monograph on organizational change in the 1877–1920 period in three federal administrative agencies (the War Department, the Civil Service Commission, and the Interstate Commerce Commission). “Bringing the State Back In” was a programmatic essay that lucidly set forth “strategies of analysis” for scholars interested in tracing the influence of governmental institutions on society and culture. *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers* was a sweeping reinterpretation of the beginnings of social welfare policy in the United States. Skocpol’s synthesis proved especially suggestive for political historians, since it demonstrated how the structural analysis of governmental institutions could provide fresh insight into race, class, and gender, topics that were at the time high on their colleagues’ agenda.

Among the most influential precursors to APD were the many books and articles published by the European

historian Charles Tilly. Though Tilly wrote little about the United States, his scholarship provided U. S. historians with a bracing critique of the then-dominant social-history paradigm, a critique that Tilly advanced in *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (Tilly 1984) and elaborated in *Coercion, Capital and European States: AD 990–1990* (Tilly 1990).

One of the most seminal publications from the 1980s to shift attention to governmental institutions was *Bringing the State Back In*, an edited collection of unusual distinction that was published in 1985 under auspices of the Social Science Research Council (Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol 1985). Among the several essays in this collection was the programmatic essay of Skocpol's on "Bringing the State Back In" that was mentioned above (Skocpol 1985). In this essay, Skocpol outlined three approaches to the study of state–society relationships that had been adopted by social scientists: the society-centered approach, which denied that the state had *autonomy* in relationship to social classes (an approach she labeled Marxian); the state-centered approach, which analyzed state *capacity* (an approach she labeled Weberian); and the macro-social approach, which emphasized state *effects*, including, in particular, the unintended consequences of configurations of governmental institutions (an approach she labeled Tocquevillian). Skocpol's essay would prove to be highly influential in the decades to come, not least because it clarified the limitations and possibilities of all three approaches.

In the following years, social scientists working in the institutionalist tradition published a spate of monographs that would help transform APD into a distinctive field. Among the monographs to prove most useful for political historians were Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg, *Working-Class Formation* (Katznelson and Zolberg 1986); Richard Franklin Bense, *Yankee Leviathan* (Bense 1990); Karen Orren, *Belated Feudalism* (Orren 1991); Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers* (Skocpol 1992); Victoria C. Hattam, *Labor Visions and State Power* (Hattam 1993); Martin Shefter, *Political Parties and the State* (1994); Kenneth Finegold and Theda Skocpol, *State and Party in America's New Deal* (1995); Bartholomew H. Sparrow, *From the Outside In* (Sparrow 1996); Amy Bridges, *Morning Glories* (1997); Elizabeth S. Clemens, *People's Lobby* (Clemens 1997); Gretchen Ritter, *Goldbugs and Greenbacks* (Ritter 1997); Suzanne Mettler, *Dividing Citizens* (Mettler 1998); Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform* (Sanders 1999); Bense, *Political Economy of American Industrialization* (Bense 2000); Scott C. James, *Presidents, Parties, and the State* (James 2000); Daniel P. Carpenter, *Roots of Bureaucratic Autonomy* (Carpenter 2001); Daniel J. Tichenor, *Dividing Lines* (Tichenor 2002); Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy* (Skocpol 2003); Richard M. Vallely, *Two Reconstructions* (Vallely 2004); Bense, *American Ballot Box* (Bense 2004); Aristide R. Zolberg, *Nation by Design* (Zolberg 2006); Kimberly S. Johnson, *Governing the American State* (Johnson 2007); Michelle Landis Dauber, *The Sympathetic State* (Dauber 2012); and Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself* (2013). While these monographs differed in many ways, they certain features in common. Each built on the institutionalist tradition that had been revived by Skowronek and Skocpol; each engaged with historical writing on related topics; and each displayed a familiarity with the relevant primary sources. In addition, most focused largely, if not exclusively, on the period between the Civil War and the Second World War, a time span that would long be a favorite for APD. One related monograph—Amy Bridges, *City in the Republic* (Bridges 1984)—appeared prior to the publication of Skocpol's essay. Interestingly, it focused on the early republic, a period that APD practitioners would mostly eschew. (For rare exceptions, see Lomazoff 2012; Adler 2012; and Jensen 2003.)

Political history and APD share a preoccupation with the relationship of governmental institutions and civic ideals. It is, thus, not surprising that in the past few decades several academic forums have been established to highlight their commonalities. Especially influential is the pre-doctoral fellowship program at the University of Virginia's Miller Center led by political historian Brian Balogh and political scientist Sidney M. Milkis; the semi-annual meetings of the Policy History Conference, an organization founded and for many years run by historian Donald T. Critchlow; and the ongoing workshop in twentieth-century political history at Columbia University convened by the political scientist Ira Katznelson and the political historian Alan Brinkley. Opportunities for interdisciplinary dialogue have been numerous, friendships have been formed, and ideas have been shared. For historians of the recent past, Princeton's Julian E. Zelizer has been particularly successful at straddling the interdisciplinary divide. The fruits of this dialogue can be sampled in the many titles in a distinguished book series—the "Princeton Studies in American Politics: Historical, International, and Comparative Perspectives"—as well as several essay collections (John 2006a; Jacobs, Novak, and Zelizer 2003; Katznelson and Shefter 2002; Shafer and Badger 2001).

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APD, like political science, is regarded by its leading practitioners as a social science. Political history, in contrast,

like the discipline of history of which it is a subfield, is regarded by many if not most leading practitioners not as a social science, but rather, like literature, art, and philosophy, as a humanity (Ekirch 1994).

While APD and political history have much in common, they are by no means identical. It is a mistake to contend, as some social scientists do, that historians are mere storytellers. On the contrary, historians are trained to engage in sophisticated arguments about substance and method and often aspire to craft theoretically informed analytical narratives that bridge the divide between history and social science (Hofstadter 1956). Yet in the end most historians *do* regard storytelling as an art, while virtually all social scientists regard storytelling as a means to the end of framing persuasive arguments.

Not surprisingly, APD and political history have a different aesthetic. The best historical writing breathes in a way that even the most artful political science writing does not. And when political scientists try to write for a general audience—as James Morone did, for example, in *Hellfire Nation* (Morone 2003)—they find themselves vulnerable, fairly or unfairly, to the critique that, in the attempt to render a vast subject accessible, they have oversimplified a complex reality (Garrow 2003).

Closely related to these aesthetic differences are differences in method. Political scientists have brought a sophistication to several topics in U. S. political history that political historians neglect. Among them are Congress and regionalism. Scholarship by political historians on Congress is notoriously unsystematic and can benefit from the rigorous analysis of voting, agenda-setting, and institutional rule-making—topics at which political scientists (many of whom are not APD practitioners) excel (Katznelson 2013; Jenkins and Stewart 2013; Katznelson and Lapinski 2006; Zelizer 2004; Katznelson and Milner 2002; Poole and Rosenthal 1997; Binder 1997). In addition, and with a few conspicuous exceptions (Barreyre 2011; Richardson 2007), political historians have proved reluctant to follow the lead of APD practitioners and underscore the influence of regionalism on public policy (Bensel 2000, 1984). This is true despite the distinguished pedigree of regionalism in historical scholarship, a pedigree that goes all of the way back to the “sectionalist” school pioneered by Frederick Jackson Turner, one of the founders of the historical profession.

In virtually every branch of historical inquiry, the challenge of keeping up with the literature can be daunting. It is, thus, not surprising—and not necessarily to be lamented—that APD practitioners are sometimes oblivious to recent trends in historical writing. Sometimes, in fact, this circumstance can be an advantage: APD scholarship often brims with citations to worthy but unfashionable older monographs by historians that historians, in their rush to be au courant, have forgotten or dismissed. In historical writing, as in so many disciplines, the most recent is not necessarily the best. Sometimes, however, the absence of cross-fertilization is a missed opportunity. This is particularly true when APD practitioners turn their attention to topics—such as, for example, the influence of slavery on state-building—upon which historians have lavished attention of late (Van Cleve 2010; Waldstreicher 2009; Rothman 2005; Fehrenbacher 2001). To be sure, APD practitioners have made distinguished contributions to our understanding of the relationship of slavery to American public life (Graber 2006). Yet APD monographs on slavery-related topics are often narrowly cast and display a selective engagement with recent historical writing on related topics (Ericson 2011). Other topics of interest to political historians that APD practitioners have mostly neglected include the foundations of public finance (Einhorn 2006; Edling 2003); public administration in the early republic (Watson 2012, 2013; Rao 2012; John 1995), Civil War military procurement (Wilson 2006a,b), municipal government in the progressive era (Radford 2013; John 2010; Willrich 2003; Rodgers 1998), and the transformation of public finance since the First World War (Mehrotra 2009, 2013; Smith 2006; Sparrow 2011).

Similar questions can be raised about the monographs that APD practitioners regard as exemplary. If course syllabi posted on the web can be taken as representative, then it would seem hard to deny that APD practitioners and political historians have somewhat divergent conceptions of the state of the field. A case in point is scholarship on topics in the half century following the adoption of the federal Constitution. APD reading lists are more likely to feature decades-old perennials, such as James Sterling Young’s *Washington Community* (Young 1966) and Gordon Wood’s *Creation of the Republic* (Wood 1969), rather than newer monographs that explore topics of central interest to the field—e.g. Joanne B. Freeman’s *Affairs of Honor* (Freeman 2001); Max Edling’s *Revolution in Favor of Government* (Edling 2003); John L. Brooke’s *Columbia Rising* (Brooke 2010); or Benjamin H. Irvin’s *Clothed in Robes of Sovereignty: The Continental Congress and the People Out of Doors* (Irvin 2011). This is true even though many of the most arresting of Young’s and Wood’s claims have been challenged, and in some instances supplanted, by political historians working on similar topics.

The insularity of APD is reinforced by the disinclination of some (though by no means all) APD practitioners to engage with—and, in some instances, even to cite—institutionally oriented historical writing on topics in American political history that have been written by historians. To the consternation of historians this is far from accidental. In fact, two of APD's leading standard bearers, Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, have gone so far as to announce, in a coauthored overview of the field—*The Search for American Political Development*—that they had excluded from their bibliography scholarship written by historians (Orren and Skowronek 2004, 34). In so doing, they displayed a habit of mind that most historians, and even many of their fellow political scientists, find unsettling. In *The Search for American Political Development*, as fellow political scientist Sidney M. Milkis has declared, Orren and Skowronek paid “little attention to historians”: “Orren and Skowronek do not define their tasks as a multidisciplinary one; rather, their APD primer sets out an agenda for historically savvy political scientist, and thus downplays the language of time and contingency to which most historians are committed” (Milkis 2006, 754).

Perhaps the most enduring difference between APD and political history concerns research design. Historians are trained to organize their research around a substantial body of documents, which historians call primary sources, in the conviction that, if properly interpreted, these documents can yield insights into the interplay of individuals, institutions, and events that are not easily found elsewhere. If these documents are located in an institutional repository (such as the National Archives or the manuscripts department of the American Antiquarian Society), they are termed “archival” to distinguish them from other primary sources—such as newspapers, magazines, and published government reports—that can be found in libraries or, increasingly, on the web. Archival documents are valued by historians not only for the kinds of information that they contain—information that can often be reconstructed from no other source—but also for their candor. Many archival documents were intended to remain private, increasing the likelihood that they can deepen understanding of phenomena that contemporaries wished to keep out of public view. Some APD practitioners have emulated political historians by conducting archival research (Carpenter 2001; Sparrow 1996), while others have mined published primary sources (Bensel 2000, 2004; Sanders 1999). Still other APD practitioners, however, rely exclusively on scholarship published by political historians—a stopgap that is inevitable, at least to a certain degree, in all historical research (no one can know everything about everything) but that increases the likelihood that their conclusions will be shaped by interpretative canons of a bygone era.

The methodological divide between APD and political history owes a good deal to the audiences that APD practitioners and political historians aspire to engage. Historians envision as their ideal audience the well-informed reader and strive to craft interpretative frameworks that will become so uncontroversial that they are taken for granted. “History is more important than historians” is for many a rallying cry. APD practitioners, in contrast, write primarily for their fellow social scientists, predisposing them to seek credit for a particular theoretical innovation, and even the illuminating phrase. As APD has become more institutionalized within political science, an influential cohort of practitioners has become more interested in intra-disciplinary quarrels than in maintaining links between APD and political history. At the same time, the revival of U. S. political history within the historical profession has encouraged political historians to devote more attention to the content of U. S. history textbooks than to the latest theoretical refinements in APD.

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The enduring differences between APD and political history can be illustrated by surveying the response of historians to Skowronek's *New American State*. “Every so often, a scholar writes a book that helps to define a field in one of the major scholarly disciplines,” observed Zelizer in a tribute published on the twentieth anniversary of its publication: “By focusing on the institutions that every Progressive Era interest confronted and the institutions they tried to create in response to their various needs, his book offered a fresh synthesis in a historiographical debate that had reached a dead end” (Zelizer 2003, 426, 437).

Part of the reason for the staying power of *New American State* is its unapologetic focus on public administration. At the time of its publication, it would have been highly unusual for a political historian of comparable ambition to undertake a parallel project. By the 1970s, the center of gravity in the historical profession had shifted away from institutional topics, which were ritually derided as old-fashioned and elitist (or “top down”), and toward the recovery of the “lived experience” of marginalized social groups, including blacks, women, and the poor (Kammen 1980). For various reasons—which included a disillusionment with the “war on poverty” and the Vietnam War and the deep-seated cynicism about the political elite that accompanied the Watergate scandal—the rising generation

of historians was less inclined to investigate how governmental institutions worked than to write history “from the bottom up” (Ciepley 2000, 2006).

This historiographical sea change would come to be known, somewhat misleadingly, as the “new” social history. In fact, the “new” social history was not as innovative as its marketing-savvy practitioners advertised, and had no special claim to the “social”—the common ground of all historical inquiry. Yet it was nothing if not influential. Even political historians would by 1980 come to hail as the “cutting edge” scholarship that dwelled less on governmental institutions than on electoral behavior, including, in particular, the influence on voting patterns of cultural impulses rooted in ethnicity and religion.

Not everyone agreed. Even among political historians, there remained a stalwart few in the 1980s who questioned whether electoral behavior held the key to public policy (McDonald 1990, 1989; Leuchtenberg 1986; McCormick 1986). Yet there was little evidence that many historians were listening. It was, for example, unusual at this time for history departments to advertise positions in political history, and, when they did, positions often went to newly minted PhDs who were specializing in social and cultural topics that had, at best, a tangential relationship to the history of governmental institutions. For a history Ph.D. candidate at a major research university in this period to write a dissertation on federal administrative agencies in the 1877–1920 period would have been risky if the candidate hoped to obtain a tenure-track position upon the completion of his or her degree. In other disciplines, in contrast, the study of governmental institutions retained a certain cachet. Predictably, then, some of the most penetrating historically oriented monographs on policy-related topics in the 1980s would originate as dissertations in political science, sociology, and economics, and for several years some of the most innovative work in the history of governmental institutions would originate in disciplines other than history.

This is not to say that historians had lost sight of either the state or institutions. In fact, scholars influenced by critical legal theory probed the influence of law on social relationships (Tomlins 2010), while social historians analyzed public schools, prisons, and other institutions through a Foucauldian lens (Meranze 1996). APD offered political historians a way to think about governmental institutions that was distinct from, though often in dialogue with, these two traditions.

The “dead end” that Zelizer identified in his 2003 essay, and that *New American State* helped political historians escape, was partly methodological. *New American State* underscored the potential of a style of scholarship that emphasized the interplay between governmental institutions and governmental administrators. For political historians temperamentally inclined to trace social change to insurgent social movements, this was an arresting insight: government administrators could, at least at certain junctures, be agents of change.

The contribution of *New American State* to historical writing was not only methodological, but also substantive, and in two different ways. First, and most obviously, it reinvigorated a longstanding debate over the character of the early twentieth-century political reform movement known as progressivism. Progressivism had long been characterized as a response to late-nineteenth-century industrialism, urbanization, and modernization—that is, as a political response to a social transformation. *New American State* raised the alternative possibility that progressivism could be characterized as an outcome not only of the transformation of American society, but also of changes originating within the American state. Political historians differed as to whether the organizational innovations that Skowronek described were, as Skowronek contended, a “patchwork” rooted in prior institutional arrangements, or a “pattern” with their origins in the distant past (Keller 1983). In addition, specialists have critiqued, either implicitly or explicitly, Skowronek’s analysis of railroad regulation (Churella 2013; Berk 2009; Usselman 2002; Berk 1994) and army reorganization (Watson 2006; 2012, 8–11, 23, and 313n15; 2013; Wilson 2006a,b). Yet the challenge that Skowronek posed has been substantial and enduring. No longer would it be possible to characterize the progressives’ achievements without reference to the institutional arrangements that they inherited and the governmental institutions that they built. Subsequent scholarship on a multitude of topics has abundantly affirmed Skowronek’s basic insight that the organizational configuration in which government administrators operate shapes not only the administrators’ policy options but also the likelihood that they will succeed.

Skowronek’s second, and most controversial, substantive contribution was his characterization of the American state in the early republic as a “state of courts and parties.” Several influential historians who specialize in the post-1877 period have found Skowronek’s characterization apt, as have scores of political scientists (Keller 2007;

Galambos 1987). Specialists in the history of the early republic, in contrast, including this essayist, have almost uniformly rejected it as misleading (Edling 2010; John 2003, 2004, 2006a,b, 2008a,b,d; Jensen 2003). The early American state, political historians now agree, was stronger, more powerful, and more autonomous than Skowronek's characterization would lead one to assume. In a deliberate challenge to Skowronek, one historian has published a book-length history of the nineteenth-century federal government (Balogh 2009), while another is in the process of writing a history of the American state at the federal, state, and municipal levels in the period before the Second World War (Gerstle 2009). The state in the early republic, observed Max M. Edling, in summarizing what has become for institutionally oriented political historians, the new consensus, played an instrumental role not only in subjugating the native population and forestalling military conflicts between the individual states, but also in promoting American commerce, expanding American territory, defending the country's political independence against the European great powers, and, at least for seven decades, preserving the union: "These achievements have been ignored because they form the parameters rather than the objects of historical inquiries into the nation's history. We are too used to the idea of the early republic as an independent state, a federal union, a flourishing commercial society, and a rapidly evolving nation to see these features of American history as anything but inevitable" (Edling 2010, 31).

Particularly problematic has been Skowronek's characterization of American political culture in the early republic as "stateless" in the sense that, despite the existence of a state (a "state of courts and parties"), contemporaries lacked a *sense of the state*. To substantiate this claim, Skowronek relied neither on the scholarship of historians nor the considered judgment of contemporaries. Instead, he rested his conclusion on the assertions of three European political theorists—Hegel, Marx, and Tocqueville—only one of whom had set foot in the United States (John 2006b). Skowronek's decision to confine the bulk of his research to the post-Civil War period is understandable: monographs almost by definition are quite narrowly bounded in time as well as in space. Yet it remains startling to a historian that a scholar could confidently base sweeping generalizations about the character of American political culture during its formative era on such a thin empirical foundation. Not only historians, but also political scientists, would find Skowronek's conclusions in this regard to be wide of the mark (John 2006b, 2008b; Farr 1995; Gunnell 1995).

Notwithstanding these caveats, it is important not to lose sight of the main point: *New American State* reoriented the writing of political history. This is particularly impressive, given the relative narrowness of its theme: namely, the changing character of federal administrative agencies in the period between 1877 and 1920. Interestingly, in his later scholarship Skowronek has remained tightly focused on the federal executive. Skowronek's second monograph—*The Politics Presidents Make* (Skowronek 1997)—remains more than fifteen years after its publication the single most ambitious historical analysis of the challenges and opportunities that have confronted the nation's presidents from the eighteenth century to the present. Yet historians have proved reluctant to adopt Skowronek's analytical categories, while even some of Skowronek's colleagues in political science have raised questions about his commitment to interdisciplinarity. "For some of us who welcome the end of the artificial divide between history and political science," one fellow political scientist observed, in an appreciative yet critical review, *Politics Presidents Make* was "in a way, a step backward" (Wilson 1994, 356). Even so, by framing an argument about the presidency that covered much of the U. S. history, it accomplished a feat that many APD-oriented political historians had regarded as impossible: namely, it has returned a modicum of intellectual respectability to the long-maligned "presidential synthesis."

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In the years since the publication of *New American State*, the relationship between APD and political history has shifted substantially. Initially, political historians looked to APD to illuminate topics that had fallen out of favor in history departments. Prominent among these was the history of public administration. Historians interested in filling out their understanding of the evolution of the federal government had long benefited from the scholarship of an earlier generation of political scientists, of whom the most prolific had been Leonard D. White (John 1996), the author of a magisterial four-volume overview of federal public administration that, with the notable exception of the Civil War (1861–1865), spanned the period between 1787 and 1900. Political scientists from earlier generations had also published monographs on state-level governmental institutions that historians found useful (Hartz 1947; John 1997). Yet in 1982 these state-level monographs were all several decades old.

The publication of *New American State* inspired a new generation of scholars to turn their attention to the history of

public administration. Among the scholarship that it has helped spawn has been a major new history of the first century of federal public administration (Mashaw 2012) and a flurry of challenging books and articles on the racial dimension of the twentieth-century American state (King and Lieberman 2009; Katznelson 2005; Horton 2005; Lieberman 1998; King 1995). At least part of the distinctiveness of this scholarship can be found in the willingness of APD practitioners to engage with an older body of scholarship on the history of public administration that stretched back to White and his interwar colleagues. Keeping up with the literature can have its perils. Political scientists feel less of a professional need than historians to stay abreast of the latest historical monographs in U. S. history. In some instances, this poses problems; in others, it can yield rich rewards. By maintaining a tight focus on perennial issues in political development, APD practitioners sometimes do a better job of mining valuable, if unfashionable, older scholarship than do historians fixated on the next new thing.

In several areas, APD practitioners have advanced arguments that political historians have been slow to engage. Bense's analysis of the causal relationship between regionalism and popular politics in late-nineteenth-century American industrialization has mostly been overlooked (Bense 1984, 2000), as has his linkage of different policy issues with different branches of the federal government and his speculation that American political economic development in this period would appear in a quite different light if we shift our frame of reference from Europe to East Asia (Bense 2009). It will, similarly, be intriguing to see how political historians engage Katznelson's recently published analysis of the pivotal role of southern lawmakers in the promulgation of domestic and foreign policy during the New Deal (Katznelson 2013).

Among the thriving trading zones between political history and APD has been the history of communications. Here, too, Skowronek's influence—and, more broadly, that of the APD tradition that *New American State* did much to encourage—has been salutary. The best one-volume historical overview of communications policy in the United States was authored by Paul Starr, a sociologist much influenced not only by recent historical writing on governmental institutions, but also by the institutionalist turn in political science (Starr 2004). Institutionally oriented scholarship has been published on topics ranging from the early history of the post office (John 1995) to the establishment of the Federal Communications Commission (Moss and Fein 2003) and the relationship of radio and newspapers in the interwar period (Stamm 2011).

The interdisciplinary dialogue between APD and political history has informed my recently published monograph—*Network Nation: Inventing American Telecommunications* (John 2010)—on the formative era of the U.S. telegraph and telephone business. *Network Nation* built on the APD commonplace that the organizational configuration, or political structure, in which enterprises operate can exert a large and enduring influence on their managers' business strategy. In so doing, it inverted a celebrated adage popularized by business historian Alfred D. Chandler, Jr. In *Strategy and Structure* (1962), Chandler contended that the business strategy of an enterprise shaped its organizational structure. In so doing, and in a spirit that was typical of so many mid-twentieth-century historians, Chandler rejected the presumption that governmental institutions could be agents of change. *Network Nation*, in contrast, demonstrated how, in the formative era of American telecommunications that opened with the granting of the first patent rights to telegraph inventor Samuel F. B. Morse in 1840 and closed with the opening of the first commercial radio station in 1920, the political structure of the American state at the federal, state, and municipal levels shaped the business strategy of telegraph and telephone companies large and small, including Western Union and American Telephone and Telegraph (or AT&T), which were, at the time, two of the largest corporations in the world (John 2008c, 2010). In reaching this conclusion, it drew on concepts that had been elaborated, respectively, by the political scientist-turned-historian Colleen A. Dunlavy and the historical sociologist-turned communications scholar Robert Britt Horwitz: namely, that the state can have a "structuring presence" and that rate-and-entry regulation can shape business strategy (Dunlavy 1994; Horwitz 1989).

The history of communications is but one of several institutionally oriented realms into which historians have moved in recent years that they had been reluctant to tackle in 1982. Among these realms (and this list is by no means exhaustive) are federalism (Edling 2013a,b, 2010; Morser 2011; Gerstle 2009; Lacey 2000); law (Witt 2012; Mashaw 2012; Novak 2010, 2008, 2002, 2001, 1996; Tomlins 2010; Wilson 2008; Usselman and John 2006; Willrich 2003); taxation (Mehrotra 2009, 2013; Michelmore 2012; Martin, Mehrotra, and Prasad 2009; Einhorn 2006, 1991); regulation (Churella 2013; Grisinger 2012; McCraw 2012; Rao 2011, 2012; Irwin and Sylla 2011; John 2006a,b, 2010; Berk 2009, 1994; Adams 2006; Childs 2005; Klein 2003; Moss 2002; Usselman 2002; Brinkley 1995; Dubofsky 1994); public works (Radford 2013; Smith 2006); social movements (White 2011; Edwards 2009, 2010; Postel 2007; Jacobs 2007; Rodgers 1998; Foner 1988); public life and civil society (Brooke 2010; Butterfield

2009; Neem 2008; Novak 2001); military mobilization (Wilson 2006a,b, 2013; Watson 2006, 2012, 2013; Sparrow 2011; Angevine 2004); citizenship (Thompson and Onuf 2013; Sparrow 2011; Canady 2009; Ngai 2004; Keyssar 2000); and international relations (Golove and Hulsebosch 2010; Levinson and Sparrow 2005; Onuf 2000). Political development has also emerged as a major theme in one highly regarded U. S. history textbook (Maier, Smith, Keyssar, and Kevles 2006) and one innovative history of an American region (White 1991). Closely related, yet distinct from this scholarship is the vein of historical writing that builds on the insights of Douglass C. North and the new institutionalism in economics (North 1990) to analyze market transactions (Lamoreaux, Raff, and Temin 2003). Only some of this scholarship has drawn directly on concepts and approaches popularized by APD. Yet all of it has been informed by the institutionalist turn in political history that APD helped inspire.

At the same time that political historians have expanded their ambit, APD has turned inward. Rather than following the capacious agenda that had been set forth by Skocpol and Tilly in the 1980s, leading practitioners (including Skowronek) have become increasingly preoccupied with methodological refinements. If political historians write with one eye cocked toward the U.S. history textbooks and the op-ed page, APD practitioners have become increasingly focused on turf battles inside departments of political science. Skowronek's *Politics Presidents Make*, for example, contributes relatively little to our understanding of the relationship of politics to other dimensions of American life—such as, for example, urbanization, industrialization, militarization, or political economy (Wilson 1994). In this regard, it is quite different from Richard Bensel's *Political Economy of American Industrialization* (Bensel 2000), in which the influence of governmental institutions on economic development became its defining problematique.

The increasing preoccupation of certain APD practitioners with methodology has opened a rift with historians who are content with the theoretical kit bag they already possess. “Historians prefer to ‘find’ connective frameworks rather than have them assigned,” observed political historian Brian Balogh in a useful review essay on the “state of the state” in American historical writing: “Remarkably, in the true spirit of social and cultural history, it appears that some historians are beginning to find the state on their own—having arrived at this point by following their subjects from private worlds and civil society into public service” (Balogh 2003, 458–59). Misgivings about the theoretical turn in APD have even been voiced by some of the founders of the field. In a brief yet penetrating essay, for example, Skocpol has observed that, in her own research, she always worked out “theoretical frameworks” in “close connection with empirical research on actual comparatively conceptualized patterns of some sort” and that, in her recently published *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, the “most important patterns” that she tried to explain came to her attention “through empirical rummaging, not theorizing” (Skocpol 1995, 104).

If the future resembles the past, the interdisciplinary dialogue between APD and political history that began in the 1980s will continue, notwithstanding enduring differences in aesthetics, methods, and audience. But with a difference. In the 1980s, the relegation of political historians to the status of junior partner had a certain logic. Today this is considerably less true. Historians will doubtless continue to draw on the large and impressive body of scholarship that APD practitioners have generated. Yet, and in large part because of their sustained engagement with APD, political historians today are in a much better position than they have been in many decades to make an enduring contribution to historical writing on the institutional dimensions of the American past.

Acknowledgments

For suggestions and advice, I am grateful to Brian Balogh, Max M. Edling, Gareth Davies, Nancy R. John, Ira Katznelson, Robert C. Lieberman, Johann Neem, Gautham Rao, Robert Y. Shapiro, Byron E. Shafer, Richard Valelly, Mark R. Wilson, and Julian E. Zelizer.

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