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# **Guilt by Innuendo: The GAO's *Political* Attack on Agency Training Programs, 1940**

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In 1940, the Government Accounting Office (GAO) released to Congress a slashing attack on in-house training programs in executive branch departments and agencies. The GAO had always used a strict constructionist approach to evaluate the legality of agency spending on training: *Was it explicitly authorized by Congress?* However, this report was much more of a broad-ranging political and ideological attack on training programs, including accusations of Communist influence and—contradictorily—influence by the Rockefellers. The report can be seen as one of the major attempts by the Congressional conservative coalition to stem the tide of modern personnel administration in the federal executive branch.

Keywords: Public Administration History, Agency Training Programs, General Accounting Office (GAO)

### **Introduction**

When considering the historical image of the Government Accounting Office (GAO) and its role in public administration, one tends to think of it as an apolitical, non-ideological, and straight-shooting agency.<sup>1</sup> Yes, accountants and auditors can sometimes be a bit persnickety and pedantic, but the reliability and solidity of its reports are the accepted norm in federal administration. One of the historical signals of this brand is the post-Brownlow Committee fight over where the GAO belonged. President Roosevelt wanted to transfer most of its duties into the executive branch, while the conservative coalition in Congress fought vehemently to keep the GAO's responsibilities intact and to continue its affiliation with the legislative branch (Roberts, 1995). Histories of the GAO have noted and praised it as the gold standard for careful research and avoidance of politics, hence a positive contribution to the professionalism of public administration and civil service (Brown, 1970; Kloman, 1979; Mosher, 1979; Mosher, 1984; Trask, 1996).

However, there was at least one lapse in the GAO's high-quality organizational culture. It happened in 1940, with a report criticizing agency training programs that used the rhetoric and attack style of Franklin D. Roosevelt's (FDR) conservative critics. Since then, the report has been largely ignored in the literature and has rarely been referred to, even then only in passing

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(Doenecke, 1990, p. 247; Rutherford, 2011). This inquiry seeks to bring the oddity of this forgotten GAO report into the historical record.

An obstacle to researching this GAO report is the absence of any archival material in the National Archive's holdings for the GAO (Record Group 411). Before the 1990s, the agency had no retention policies for its working files (Krusten, 2015). Therefore, using the historical research method of triangulation (McNabb, 2018, p. 379, p. 418), sources for this reconstruction were largely limited to public materials, such as Congressional documents, newspaper coverage, and professional publications. A few archival sources were helpful, including the unpublished version of the diary of Interior Secretary Harold Ickes and records of the U.S. Civil Service Commission (CSC). For interpreting and analyzing the historical record, this author relied on an historical evaluation standard Clark used for the origins of World War I (WWI), which he called the logic of "maximum plausibility" for explicating events and motivations (2013, p. 48).

### **The GAO's Traditional Opposition to Agency Training Programs**

The big bang moment of federal activism occurred with FDR's inauguration in March of 1933. He quickly expanded the scope of federal responsibilities in an effort to find a way to end the Great Depression. He was not concerned about precedent, norms, or traditions. The only things that mattered were action and results. FDR's ideological critics found much to dislike, including charges of patronage, illegality, and just about anything that was new.

At the time, the GAO was viewed by conservatives as one of the few effective restraints on FDR's activism. It had the power to deem any spending of Congressionally appropriated funds as legal or illegal, within the scope of an agency's statutory mission or not. All the "t's" needed to be crossed and the "i's" dotted to get past the GAO's scrutiny. At the time, the GAO's approach to making decisions about appropriate spending was based on a strict interpretation of the statutes. Spending was considered legal only if Congress explicitly authorized a particular activity. Vague arguments by New Dealers about implicitly sanctioned activities as falling within an agency's mission and *raison d'être* fell on deaf ears at the GAO.

One of the long-running administrative functions affected by the GAO's narrow view of the law related to agency funding of training for its employees. This was a dogmatic approach that predated FDR. For example, in 1922, the GAO ruled that the Public Health Service could not reimburse its chief nurse for taking a course on health administration at Columbia University. The cost of that training "is not within the scope of the appointment or duties of a nurse." Furthermore, the course was "either for her own improvement or for the improvement of the service generally." She should be denied her salary for the time she was away as well as reimbursement for her tuition and related expenses (US GAO, 1922). Similarly, in 1926, the GAO ruled that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) did not have statutory authority to send its staffers to training programs run by educational institutions, even though those programs related to their official duties (US GAO, 1926).

The GAO's strict constructionist standards for federal funding of training programs continued with FDR's administration. In 1936, it ruled that the Panama Canal Zone's Police Department could not fund an officer attending a course in scientific training, even if gaining such expertise would benefit the department in fulfilling its general law enforcement mission. The key was that the department had "no statutory provision" to fund training (US GAO, 1936). A few years later, for the same reasons, the GAO ruled that the Labor Department could not fund training of state or local civil servants to improve enforcing the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938. The opinion

stated flatly that “it is a well-established rule that government officers or employees may not, in the absence of specific statutory authority, be furnished educational courses or other training at government expense” (US GAO, 1939). Such activities were considered to be of personal benefit to the employee, rather than within one’s official duties.

In 1940, one of the Labor Department’s personnel specialists concluded sadly that the Comptroller had “upset the plans of progressive administrators by his adverse rulings” on agency training programs. As a personnel specialist, he was baffled by such a stance because specialized training of current employees was within “the responsibility that the science of management places upon an agency for obtaining effective administration.” The only solution he could recommend was to request that Congress enact, on an agency-by-agency basis, laws that explicitly permitted funding training (Murphy, 1940).

The leaders of the new profession of public administration similarly disagreed with the GAO’s policy. The final report of the Rockefeller-funded Commission of Inquiry on Public Service Personnel in 1935 included a recommendation for “the training *in* the [civil] services of the best administrative talent” (Commission of Inquiry on Public Service Personnel, 1935, p. 17, emphasis added).<sup>2</sup> Separately, a 1935 conference on training for public service (also Rockefeller-funded) called for agencies to increase post-entry training programs of current employees, focusing particularly on apprenticeships and in-service classes (Lambie, 1935, pp. xii-xiii).<sup>3</sup> That same year, a survey by a University of Chicago graduate student identified the existence of several highly specialized training programs within federal agencies, in particular the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) school for advanced training of its agents (Devine, 1935).<sup>4</sup> Like the other extant in-house training programs he was able to find, each was based on congressional authorization.

Reflecting the newer public administration thinking about the importance of training, the CSC released a report in May of 1939 about its planned new role in coordinating training throughout the executive branch. The position paper emphasized the coordinative and consultative roles that the commission would play, a signal to agencies that the commission would not try to impinge on their autonomy regarding what training each had sponsored. Oddly, the 19-page paper made no mention of the GAO’s strict restrictions on training nor any warning to agencies to be careful not to tread too closely to the GAO’s red lines (US CSC, 1939a).

### **FDR Faces Republican Conservatives in Charge of the GAO**

The landmark Budget and Accounting Act of 1921 was the signal victory for good government and public administration reformers who, for years, had been advocating for a president-centric budgeting system. Signed by President Harding, the act created the Bureau of the Budget and assigned the president the duty to submit an integrated annual budget proposal for the entire executive branch. The new law also created a General Accounting Office to audit federal spending. President Harding nominated John R. McCarl, a Republican staffer on Capitol Hill as the GAO’s first Comptroller General. By law, it was a 15-year term and without the possibility of reappointment. The Comptroller General did not serve at the pleasure of the president and therefore was politically untouchable.

Hence, when FDR took office, McCarl still had three years left in his term. Conservative McCarl disallowed many New Deal initiatives based on the GAO’s strict constructionist interpretation of the statutes (not just agency training), neatly fitting with his ideological opposition to the expansion in the scope of government. Similar to the Supreme Court that overruled many New

Deal programs as unconstitutional interference with private business, McCarl was a kind of one-person accounting Supreme Court standing athwart big government.

Roosevelt would have looked forward to McCarl's term ending in mid-1936 and replacing him with a more like-minded successor. In the meantime, President Hoover and Congressional Republicans had placed a kind of back-up time bomb in the GAO. In 1931, Hoover nominated lame-duck Indiana Congressman Richard N. Elliott as Assistant Comptroller General, an office that also had a 15-year term. (Elliott had been defeated for reelection in the mid-term 1930 election, a harbinger of the 1932 Democratic landslide). That meant Elliott would be in office through 1946 and would automatically be the acting comptroller general whenever there was a vacancy in the Comptroller General position. It was a small consolation to New Dealers that Elliott would hit his mandatory retirement age in 1943, three years before the expiration of his term.

Like McCarl, Elliott was a conservative who reflected his times, viewing the role of the federal executive branch as strictly limited. Nicely, the GAO's strict constructionist interpretation of the powers of federal agencies provided a seemingly nonpartisan rationale to constrain the New Deal. As Acting Comptroller General, Elliott continued putting brakes on expansive activities of federal agencies and programs. Two of FDR's most combative and liberal cabinet secretaries, the Treasury's Morgenthau and Interior's Ickes, loudly and vociferously complained about Elliott's rulings undercutting their initiatives, but could do little about it. Morgenthau said that Elliott was trying to be a "czar" of all federal spending and that the GAO had assumed powers "not entrusted to it by law" ("Elliott Called Would-Be Czar," 1938). Ickes wrote a "blistering rebuke" to an Elliott decision limiting operation of cafeterias in federal buildings ("Ickes Scores Elliott," 1940).

FDR did not nominate a successor to McCarl when his term expired in 1936, nor in 1937 or 1938. That meant Elliott was the Acting Comptroller General for those years.<sup>5</sup> The reason was the reorganization plan, prepared and proposed in 1937 by the President's Committee on Administration Management, known as the Brownlow Committee for its chair. One of its recommendations was a major revamping of the GAO, narrowing its function to post-spending auditing, while the Treasury Department would assume the role of accounting. The congressional conservative coalition vociferously opposed this plan. While this fight was playing out in 1937 and 1938, the president likely did not want to have an incumbent Comptroller General in office with a 15-year term. That would complicate the possibility of changing the office's powers into an Auditor General. Better to leave the office vacant so that the proposed reorganization would have one less obstacle to implementation.

The fight over reorganizing the federal government was a running argument from 1937 to 1939. Eventually and pragmatically, FDR accepted a greatly reduced bill granting him limited reorganization powers subject to a legislative veto. The bill also included a flat prohibition on using those reorganization powers to touch the GAO. It had a similar exclusion for the CSC and many other congressional sacred cows (Lee, 2016).

Having lost the fight to reorganize the GAO, in March of 1939, Roosevelt nominated lame-duck Senator Fred Brown (D-NH) to be Comptroller General. The *Chicago Tribune* promptly criticized the nomination by characterizing Brown as a "100% Yes-Man" to Roosevelt who would reverse the GAO's previous rulings and give greater latitude to New Deal programs and spending (Manly, 1939). Brown was quickly confirmed by his former colleagues and took office in April of 1939. But Brown became very ill in December and was wholly absent from work for about eight months. That meant Elliott was Acting Comptroller General again. Brown finally resigned in

June of 1940, giving the president an opportunity to end Elliott's role as acting head of the GAO. According to *The Washington Post*, high officials in the administration indicated "relief" that Elliott would no longer be in charge because they had "frequently tangled on policy questions" with him ("Brown Resigns," 1941). Within weeks of Brown's resignation, FDR nominated Congressman Lindsay Warren (D-NC) to the comptroller generalship. Warren was confirmed by the Senate in August 1940, but said he would delay his resignation to serve as acting majority leader until House Democrats picked a permanent successor. Warren was not sworn in until November of 1940, meaning that Elliott continued as Acting Comptroller General until then.<sup>6</sup>

In total, Elliott was Acting Comptroller General for about four of the nine years he had served as assistant. For New Dealers, Elliott's permanent demotion after Warren finally took office was "a welcome move" ("Warren Takes Oath," 1940). *The Washington Post's* daily columnist covering the civil service dryly noted that Elliott now "has time on his hands" compared with his previous powerful status as the acting head of the GAO (Kluttz, 1940).

### **The GAO Report on Executive Branch Training Programs: April 12, 1940**

Many GAO reports were reactive, such as in response to a specific development or complicated issue. They were sometimes requested by agencies or Congress. They tended to be as dry as dust, examining arcane matters in the context of the GAO's strict constructionist approach to statutory interpretation. In contrast with that, on April 12, 1940, Elliott submitted a "special report" to Congress on *Schools and Training Courses in Government Departments*. Indicating how unusual it was, its formal subtitle made a point to state that the report had been prepared "pursuant to law" (US Senate, 1940). In his cover message, Elliott said that the GAO's power to initiate such a report was based on the 1921 Budget and Accounting Act, giving it the authority to investigate any matter relating to federal expenditures.<sup>7</sup>

Elliott's cover letter obliquely introduced the reader to the unusual tenor of the report. The subject was that there were "certain" schools and training programs that "appear" to go "far beyond" the red lines of the GAO's longstanding position. First, he flagged a program that sponsored training classes in federal buildings without paying rent. The fees the students paid were "considerable sums," but "no accounting" was made to the government for use of its property. Furthermore, federal costs absorbed by the host agency included "heat, light, elevator service, telephones, etc." Second, Elliott complained that "one society or organization...which is financed by a private foundation or endowment, is being permitted to participate in the activities" of several federal agencies by operating a "so-called internship training" program. It all sounded very sinister and a major threat to conventional government.

The 42-page report consisted of two parts, a "Statement of Facts" (pp. 1–11) and "Details" (pp. 11–42), which were the evidence documenting those claims. The report briefly mentioned training programs in some other government agencies, but this inquiry focuses on its two main subjects: USDA's graduate school and internship programs throughout the executive branch.

### **Criticizing the USDA's Graduate School**

#### *Background*

Founded in 1921, the USDA's graduate school provided evening classes for anyone interested in attending, not just USDA staff. Students paid their own tuition, which was quite modest, and the

school coordinated with local universities so that credit from the agency's courses would be transferable toward a degree. In the 1934–1935 school year, the USDA offered 39 courses and attracted 1,514 students, about half of whom were USDA employees (Stockberger, 1935).<sup>8</sup> The most popular course that year was Elements of Personnel Administration taught by Leonard White.<sup>9</sup> It had 750 students and a waiting list of another hundred. The school had tapped into a surging interest in formal training in public administration, particularly in White's broad view of what modern personnel management should encompass (including in-house training).

The organization and management of the school was carefully constructed to avoid overt problems with the GAO. It was not an official unit in the department and was ostensibly neither managed nor controlled by the USDA. Furthermore, it did not cost the department anything because the rooms used for evening classes would have been empty at that time of day anyway. Yet, there *was* something of a relationship between the department and the school. For example, in relatively candid off-the-record comments at the 1935 Princeton conference on public administration training, USDA Personnel Director W. W. Stockberger repeatedly used the term “we” when discussing the graduate school. He delicately said that tuition covered expenses “incident” to the school, a claim quite distinct from covering *all* relevant expenses (a detail the GAO later raised) (Conference on Training for the Public Service, 1935, p. 72).<sup>10</sup> Defensively, he acknowledged one USDA employee who “devotes any material amount of his time” to the school (p. 80). Offsetting that cost, he said that the USDA gained a “substantial” benefit from the arrangement because the school donated reference books and other printed course material to USDA's library (p. 72). Nonetheless, the graduate school had attracted some “particular attention” and he meant that negatively (p. 132). Conference participants recognized that the school was treading close to the GAO's red lines (p. 81). Ideally, Stockberger admitted, new legislation could clarify the legal status of the school and perhaps even permit the USDA to cover costs of sending its own employees to the course as in-house training. But, the department had no plans to request such legislation.

### *The GAO's Facts*

In the Facts section of the report (pp. 1–3), the GAO said that the school now had about 5,000 students and offered about 150 courses. The courses covered “wide ranges of subjects” including “advanced subjects usually taught in institutions of higher learning”—implicitly asking why there was a need for the school to offer them. Those topics included sociology, “human conduct, marriage relations, personnel and business management” (p. 2). The insinuation was that these subjects were remote from traditional day-to-day government operations.

Instructors of the courses, the GAO noted, were “principally” USDA employees, raising the possibility that the school was a *de facto* departmental activity. Using a peculiar phrasing, it said instructors were paid “what the school choses to call ‘honorariums.’” Following the money, the GAO inquired with the Internal Revenue Bureau of the legal status of the school, specifically asking if it was a formal and recognized nonprofit? The treasury replied that it “Took the position that the school, being an ‘unofficial’ organization not conducted for profit, need not make income tax returns and pay taxes on its receipts.” Adding to its suspicions, the GAO noted that the formal treasurer of the school was himself a full-time Treasury official who received “a small annual salary” for this work. This insinuated that the treasury's view of the school's legal status might be influenced because a departmental employee handled its finances. The report raised the level of its incredulity about the school by stating that “no accounting has ever been made to the government for any of the school's funds” (p. 3).

The GAO complained that the USDA's authority to operate the program was based on "the supposed authority" from 1892 and 1901 laws and then by a 1938 presidential executive order. However, the GAO's close reading of those laws was that they "do nothing more" than permit making certain documents available to students and researchers. Similarly, the executive order "does nothing more" than permit in-service training courses (if permitted by law as interpreted by the GAO). This was a wholly different activity from evening classes (pp. 1–2).

Regarding the management of the school, the GAO described Dr. A. F. Woods, as its "titular head." This insinuated that he was not *really* the person who ran the school, further implying that regular USDA employees were actually in charge (in particular, staff of Stockberger's personnel office). Woods had retired from the USDA's Bureau of Plant Industry in mid-1938. (He was probably the one Stockberger had referred to in 1935 as the only USDA employee with any substantial involvement in the school). The GAO noted that Woods' civil service pension was \$1,284 a year, supplemented by what the GAO termed "bonuses" from the school of about \$6,500 a year (p. 2).

After examining the curricular materials for the graduate school's courses, the GAO complained about their ostensible political, ideological, and controversial contents. They "deal with the so-called changes generally claimed to be taking place in government and human affairs, and especially those involving government and the conduct of its business." This was evidently a reference both to the New Deal and the professionalization of public administration as embodied in the 1937 Brownlow Committee report. The school copyrighted some of the course materials "under its supposed authorship" and sold them to students. Many of these class readings "are said to have been" printed on USDA mimeograph machines for free. The GAO noted that "it is claimed" by the school that it reimbursed the department for costs incurred by the agency, but the GAO documented payments did not cover "office space, lecture rooms, lights, elevator service (other than the operator), and some physical mimeographing." The school also paid federal rates for materials and supplies, even though it was supposedly not in the USDA (p. 2).

Finally, the report lasciviously noted that the daytime use of many of the rooms the school used in the evenings were occupied by Work Progress Administration (WPA) employees involved in standardizing women's clothing sizes, apparently in order to promote inexpensive mass production. According to the GAO, "it is said" (by whom exactly is questionable) that the daytime work in those rooms included "measurement of large numbers of women as a means of gathering data in furtherance of the project" (p. 3). If this was important, it is odd that the GAO did not make the effort to confirm it. Even if documented, the report did not discuss why this detail was relevant to the legal status and finances of the school.

### *The GAO's Details*

In the Details section of the report on the USDA Graduate School (pp. 11–32), the GAO reprinted extensive excerpts from school materials and from notes of its interviews. These give a more concrete sense of the political and ideological perspectives embedded in the report.

The GAO listed some of the school's courses that triggered its concerns, such as Seminar on Internal Migration, Economic Planning in a Democracy, Economics of Instability, Labor Law and Legislation, the Problem of Unemployment, Labor and the Community, Current Social Legislation, Rural Social Psychology, Problems in the Adjustment of Personality, and Farmers in a Changing World (pp. 11–12).<sup>11</sup> The GAO particularly highlighted the many courses in public administration, including Problems of Administrative Management,<sup>12</sup> Supervisory Training,

Principles of Employee Training, and Problems in Administration and Supervision (p. 12). A few pages later, the GAO listed additional courses it was concerned about, including Economics in French and German; Creative Writing; History of Economic Thought; Subsistence Farming; and Value, Price and Distribution (pp. 13–14).<sup>13</sup> In particular, the GAO flagged a course titled *When the War Ends, What?* It was on “anticipated problems to be faced at the end of the present European war” (p. 31).

The GAO further objected to the courses being taught by federal officials and employees, suggesting this violated CSC guidance. The school was unable to show “express approval” from the commission for apparently violating this guideline. The GAO’s interpretation was that “it appears that the Civil Service Commission has withheld its decision generally, and has reserved the right to determine such matters as they arise,” but—oddly from the GAO’s perspective—had not done anything vis-à-vis the USDA graduate school (p. 14). The GAO also implied that the courses violated a USDA personnel policy banning external employment by employees, specifically “*in schools or institutions claiming to give instruction along the lines of civil-service examinations*” (p. 15, emphasis in original). This insinuated that the graduate school not only was a *de facto* in-service training program in violation of the GAO’s statutory interpretation, but also was specifically geared to passing CSC examinations. Yet, the report provided no examples to prove that any particular course was tailored to help candidates pass civil service exams.

As further proof that the USDA was violating the in-service training ban, the report provided long excerpts of a 14-page booklet issued in 1939 by the USDA’s Office of Personnel on *How to Start a Training Program* (pp. 19–23). To the GAO this was the *pièce de résistance* proving the bad faith of the USDA’s denials that the graduate school violated the GAO rulings on in-service training. Yet, the booklet carefully noted the GAO rulings and precedents. Therefore, while “it may be difficult to draw a clear line of distinction between training and post-entry education,” the publication suggested this criterion: Did the training primarily benefit the agency with only incidental personal or career benefit to the employee or not (USDA, 1939, p. 12)?<sup>14</sup>

Sprinkled throughout the Facts section are subtle declarations of incredulity by the GAO’s auditors. Some instructors were “outsiders prominent in certain lines of teaching and activities” (USDA, 1939, p. 12). The rooms used in the day by the WPA were to measure “thousands of women,” including their waistlines (p. 24). Why was the graduate school offering a course on “Famous Women of the World” (p. 24)? A lecture in another course “advertises to the Taylor system [of efficiency], and, apparently, argues for the application of its principles to” federal agencies (p. 28). The lecturer on labor-management relations “expressly refused” to state to the GAO investigators his opinion about labor relations within the USDA (p. 29). Materials on a lecture by Mrs. Walter F. Greenough (from the League of Women Voters) promoted expanding government propaganda: “The Federal Government’s information services doubtless could be better organized and more effectively managed...The point is this: The taxpaying public certainly needs, is entitled to, and as Mrs. Greenough’s lecture shows, wants and will act upon accurate knowledge of governmental affairs...In other words, more power to our information units” (p. 29). The GAO flagged that the brochure for another course “discloses” that “charges are to be made for the lectures” (p. 31). That made it sound like a highly unusual condition buried in the fine print.

### **Political Guilt by Tenuous Association**

The most explosive and politicized insinuation about the USDA graduate school came at the end of the Facts section regarding the course “*When the War Ends, What?*” The GAO noted that



“there may be, and probably is, a tie-in between these lectures and the now well-known and clearly defined movement called ‘Union Now,’ proposing a union of 15 world democracies.” The proposed organization was described in a book by that title written “by one Clarence Streit.” His concept for such a union was “broadly intimated by the president’s last message to Congress on the state of the Union.” Furthermore, “judging by press releases of the past few months, and public utterances of government officials in high places, the movement has gained such headway as to receive official sanction and advocacy.” Similarly, this “movement was prominently advocated at a meeting of the American Political Science Association” (APSA) in Washington, DC in December of 1939. A key detail was that at the APSA annual conference, “the Society for Personnel Administration was organized by government officials, including members of the Council of Personnel Administration” (pp. 31–32).

This dizzying, and openly ideological, accusation was in a chain of eight allegedly linked facts that the GAO presented and reflected the worldview of the congressional conservative coalition. Each charge deserves close explication:

1. That the USDA was offering a course on the current European war and possible post-war outcomes. This could hardly be startling coming from a school providing a multiplicity of courses, including on international relations and public affairs. The European war had been going on since September 1, 1939. Isolationists and the conservative coalition were on a hair-trigger that FDR wanted to get the United States involved in the war instead of staying neutral. The embedded, but unstated, accusation from the GAO was that this USDA course was part of an effort to advocate for the United States entering the war.
2. That “there *may* be, and *probably* is, a tie-in” (emphasis added) between those course lectures and the movement called Union Now. In other words, the GAO was guessing but had no proof. Nonetheless, that was enough to claim a link. That the lectures might touch on an idea advocated in a highly publicized book and subsequent civic movement would be natural. But the GAO offered no proof that the course sought to persuade the students to support the goal of the book. The term “tie-in” could mean anything from direct cause-effect to vague similarity.
3. “One Clarence Streit” sounds either like a police arrest report or a reference to an otherwise obscure person. Beginning in 1929, Clarence Streit had been a reporter for The New York Times stationed in Geneva, Switzerland. He was largely covering the League of Nations and related international developments. His stories were bylined (not a universal practice at the time), making him well-known to readers of the newspaper. In the fall of 1938, the Times transferred Streit to its Washington bureau to begin working there in the spring of 1939.
4. In February of 1939, Harper published Streit’s book *Union Now* (Streit, 1939a). He called for an international federation of the world’s democracies to stand up to the threat that Nazi Germany and fascist Italy posed to international peace. The week before its publication, he gave a series of lectures at Swarthmore College summarizing the key points of his book. The lectures and book were widely covered and reviewed in popular publications, such as *Life* magazine (“Peace,” 1939). Streit followed them up with a lecture tour and radio appearances. A month later, the first chapter of the book was published in pamphlet form (Streit, 1939b). Streit then updated the manuscript and published it in abridged form the next year (Streit, 1940). The book became an “astonishing” publishing phenomenon (Thompson, 1940). About 50,000 copies were sold worldwide, including translations in four languages. By the spring of 1940, the United States edition had gone through 15 printings. Various civic clubs and organizations were created in the United States to promote his ideas. Streit’s proposal, of course, was widely condemned by conservatives and isolationists.

5. That President Roosevelt's state of the union address on January 3, 1940 "broadly intimated" the internationalist theme of the book. Almost any text can be explicated as *intimating* something. The closest FDR got to international cooperation by the democracies was this passage: "We can strive with other nations to encourage the kind of peace that will lighten the troubles of the world, and by so doing help our own nation as well" (Roosevelt, 1969b, p. 2). More colorfully, he urged "fewer American ostriches in our midst" (p. 4). There was no reference to a union of all Western democracies.
6. That in the months after the President's State of the Union address, the executive branch had accepted Streit's proposal as the official policy of the administration. The GAO provided no proof or specifics for such an assertion, merely claiming the evidence was scattered throughout press releases and public statements by unnamed officials "as to" make it official policy of the government. Some of the senior cabinet members were indeed internationalists and called for the United States to stand up to Nazism and Fascism, but their individual statements do not an official policy make. Only the president can make such a policy. The GAO's claim is perhaps that FDR had secretly approved the policy, but kept the knowledge of it from Congress and the press. Such an impossible-to-rebut accusation of a secret administration policy reflected the animosity and suspicion that the conservative coalition had toward Roosevelt. It is accurate that Roosevelt sometimes did engage in secret (or deceptive) activities. But, something as major as a formal merger of the independent democracies was not a policy that could be pursued secretly.
7. The GAO's accusation of the administration's support for an international union of democracies was allegedly corroborated because some individual attendees at the annual APSA conference in December of 1939 "prominently advocated" Streit's idea. Oddly, the GAO omitted a more compelling point: Streit had *addressed* the conference at a general session of all attendees (Colegrove, 1940, p. 124). While he, of course, advocated his plan, the seven-member panel of commentators following his speech roundly criticized it, saying it was "unworkable in this generation" ("Political Science," 1939, p. 1).
8. The final point in the GAO's accusation relating to the USDA Graduate School was that at the APSA conference "the Society for Personnel Administration was organized by government officials, including members of the Council of Personnel Administration." This was a garbled and inaccurate charge linking back to the GAO's criticism of modern personnel administration, including in-house training. However, the nonprofit Society for *Personnel* Administration had been founded in 1937 (Society for Personnel Administration, 1957). Rather, the Society for *Public* Administration (later the American Society for Public Administration) was founded during the APSA conference. A conference session on "Advances in Personnel Administration" was sponsored by this new public administration organization (Colegrove, 1940, p. 121). The factual mistake is very surprising in a GAO report, indicating sloppiness and inattention to accuracy. As for the GAO's reference to the federal *Council* of Personnel Administration (consisting of the human resources [HR] directors of federal departments and agencies), it had been established by presidential executive order in June of 1938 and began operations in February of 1939 (Roosevelt, 1969a, p. 389). That the HR directors of federal agencies would want to be active in relevant professional associations, such as both of these organizations, does not demonstrate a conspiratorial activity.

In all, the GAO was claiming that the graduate school was using governmental infrastructure and money to promote the political movement for a union with other Western democracies that would, from the conservative perspective, threaten the United States' independence and sovereignty.

## **Criticizing Internships**

### *Background*

Another training initiative promoted by the new profession of public administration was the value of internships, sometimes referred to as pre-service training. Such experiences could help prepare college graduates for careers in public service by providing them with direct exposure to the real-world practice of management. This idea was appalling to political conservatives because ideologically it smacked of elitism, leading to the development of an arrogant British-style senior civil service. More tangibly, the GAO was suspicious that exposure to practice by someone who was not employed by the federal government was a violation of spending guidelines. First, there was the principle that the only people who should be hired for the civil service would be those who were *already* prepared and qualified. It was not the role of the federal government to assist private citizens to become qualified for hiring. Second, inevitably the presence of interns would involve some cost to federal agencies for hosting them, a violation of appropriations limitations unless explicitly authorized by Congress.

In 1933–1934, Commerce Secretary Daniel Roper ruminated publicly about establishing a federal school for public administrators, akin to West Point and Annapolis. Short of that, a more modest approach could be an organized effort to link college graduates to public service, such as through internships at federal agencies—at no cost to the federal government. Relatively quickly, a new nonprofit, the National Institute of Public Affairs (NIPA), was founded to help implement Roper’s vision, especially about internships. Brownlow agreed to chair its board of directors, then obtained funding from the Rockefellers, and recruited Frederick Davenport to head it.<sup>15</sup>

Beginning in 1936, NIPA operated a federal internship program. College graduates could apply for admission to a nine-month program. Annual cohorts were relatively small, about 30–40 men and women. They were placed full time as unsalaried interns in federal agencies, had weekly evening meetings to discuss their experiences, and met with guest speakers. Interns were also encouraged to enroll in evening graduate courses at local universities. The Rockefeller funding did not include a stipend for the students, it was limited to covering NIPA’s operating costs (Lee, forthcoming).

### *The GAO’s Facts*

In the Facts section of the report (pp. 5–10), the GAO complained that “another practice seems to be growing in the form of so-called ‘internships’ for training persons for entry into the government service” (p. 5). The use of quotation marks around the term internships conveyed the GAO’s view that government should not be in the business of teaching and that these “so-called” internships were somehow fraudulent.

The GAO could not provide any accurate numbers of such internships, “but there are said to be some 30 instances.” It was “unable to obtain a list of those who have been accepted as ‘interns,’ for the reason that the departments and establishments indulging in the practice do not report the facts to the Civil Service Commission” (p. 5). In general, the GAO objected to NIPA’s internship program, particularly because it “is financially supported by the Rockefeller Foundation” (p. 7). Quoting extensively from NIPA publications, the GAO noted with alarm that a large number of interns were placed in personnel offices (eight of the 1938–1939 cohort of 30 interns) and that of 65 interns who had already completed the NIPA internship program, 35 had been hired by federal agencies, nine of whom were now working in personnel offices (p. 9).<sup>16</sup>

This recounting of NIPA reflected the internal logic of the GAO's ideological critique: The new broad approach to HR promoted by Brownlovia public administration was a break with the traditional narrow and legalistic concept of civil service. In its summary of the Facts section of the report, the GAO said "The ultimate object of the personnel administration forces is...to govern and control, for the most part, the supervision, conduct, and department of employees generally" (pp. 10–11). Claiming to be an accurate summary "in substance" (i.e., without direct quotes) of an interview with the CSC's training director, the GAO concluded that "the new personnel management set-up...would, to a great extent, deprive supervisory and operating management of control over employees in the government" (p. 11). Many of such new training programs by those personnel offices supposedly violated the GAO spending guidelines. Particularly suspicious was the disproportionate placement of interns and post-interns in personnel offices. This looked like an effort to enhance and institutionalize this new mode of personnel administration contrary to the GAO guidelines.

The longest portion of the discussion of internships in the Facts section focused on an internship "prominent among instances of this character" (p. 5). It was an attack on one intern from the University of Chicago's Law School placed in the legal office of the Department of Interior's Bituminous Coal Division. The GAO based its criticism on a column in *The Washington Post's* daily "Federal Diary." The columnist described it as "a legal internship [*sic*] 'experimental project' in the Interior Department that may develop into a permanent, large-scale program" (Friendly, 1940).<sup>17</sup> The student, Walter Dean, received credit from his law school for the internship, but was not being paid and was not doing any formal office work, thus not overtly violating the GAO expenditure guidelines. His internship was overseen by Abe Fortas, the division's general counsel. The column lauded the idea because most law school graduates "often come to a government job having only read upper-court decisions and with no experience in looking at legislation hot off the griddle, and in translating it into administrative action. By working on current legal problems with other lawyers and administrative officials, it is believed, the would-be federal attorney can equip himself much more successfully." For the GAO auditors, this was not what federal agencies should do, nor were they authorized to do it even if no payment was made from federal funds.

However, the GAO's attack on this single intern focused mostly on a guilt-by-association attack on senior legal officials in the administration (p. 6). It did so by naming names. The chain started with Fortas. The GAO noted that Fortas's wife, also a lawyer, had worked at the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), a *bête noire* of the anti-union conservative coalition (Horowitz, 2003, pp. 76–77). Now she was at the Justice Department. Next, the GAO documented that the letterhead of the International Juridical Association listed Mr. Fortas as one of the leaders of the association's Washington, DC chapter. Quoting from a 1939 circular from the association, one of its goals was "to influence consideration of, and possible amendments to, the National Labor Relations Act." Furthermore, "the names of several members" of that association "are to be found on the list recently published by the Committee Investigating Subversive Activities as the alleged list of members of the American League for Peace and Democracy. Among the names on that list are those of [Mr.] Fortas" (p. 6). This meant Fortas was a likely subversive and probable Communist. Therefore, anything Fortas did as a government lawyer, including supervising a free intern, made him guilty of being un-American.

There are several important details that do not jibe with this indictment:

1. Congress did not have a "Committee Investigating Subversive Activities." The House had a Special Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities and Propaganda, chaired by Congressman Martin Dies (D-TX).<sup>18</sup> Hence, the Committee was not officially in the

business of naming subversives. By providing an inaccurate title of the committee the GAO misrepresented the committee's legislative assignment.

2. The Committee had named the league as a "Communist 'front,'" a designation different from claiming it was affiliated with the Communist Party (US House, 1939a, pp. 69–71; 1940a, pp. 10–12). Hence, some of the League members and activists could have been Communists, but not necessarily all of them.
3. The list released by the Committee was ostensibly of the members of the League's Washington, DC chapter. But *The New York Times* carefully noted that the document the Committee released was titled "Membership and Mailing List" (Hurd, 1939, p. 1, emphasis added). Therefore, not all names on the list were League members.
4. Most astonishingly, contrary to the claim in the GAO report, Abe Fortas was *not* on the list published by the Committee.<sup>19</sup>
5. The League disbanded in February of 1940 ("Peace League," 1940). Therefore, when the GAO released its report, the organization no longer existed.

In all, the tenuous accusation about the legal intern at the Interior Department was factually incorrect and smacked of later tactics of the House Un-American Activities Committee and Senator McCarthy.

Regarding NIPA, the Facts section on internships consisted mostly of long quotes from NIPA publications (pp. 7–9) as documentation of the GAO's criticisms. The report re-emphasized NIPA's link to Rockefeller funding when it noted that a NIPA program unrelated to internships (management training for Native Americans employed by Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs) was similarly funded by Rockefeller's "Spellman Foundation" (p. 9).<sup>20</sup> If an outside organization was subsidizing placement of non-employees in federal agencies (and other management training), then this implied the possibility of subverting the impartial expertise of civil service with an external agenda. In this case, Rockefeller's money was facilitating a transformation of public administration that conservatives opposed.

### *The GAO's Details*

In the Details section of the report (pp. 40–41), the GAO presented more information on the legal intern at the Interior Department. It summarized an interview that the GAO investigators had with Assistant Secretary E. K. Burlew. He said "in substance" that *The Washington Post* column "appeared to be factually accurate," that the idea for it came from Secretary Ickes, that the intern's training "had no connection with the only instruction work of the department" authorized by law (for stenographers), that the intern's work "is of some value" to the government even though he was prohibited from doing (paid) work, and that Ickes hoped to expand the experiment to cohorts of 10–12 legal interns from the University of Chicago. The GAO's details concluded with the text of the CSC's formal policy on "Work Assignments of Internes [sic] in Public Administration" (US CSC, 1939b) adopted in December of 1939 (p. 41). The GAO implied that the legal internships at the Interior violated the commission's policy.

### **Examining the Authors of the GAO Report**

Authors of GAO reports were traditionally anonymous, but this report accidentally included their names. When reproducing a letter to the GAO from the Census Director about the bureau's training programs, the opening line of the letter was: "On September 8 [1939], Messrs. Parker, Barger, and Garber, representing the Division of Investigations of the General Accounting Office, called at the census bureau and requested information" (US Senate, 1940, p. 38).

Based on independent sources, it is possible to document that Parker was J. Murray Parker, a young attorney and a relatively nondescript and common type of GAO staffer (Hart, 1938; “Engagements,” 1938). However, based on available public sources, this researcher could not identify Garber definitively. He may have been Don M. Garber, a federal civil servant at the time. The lack of further information about him can be interpreted as meaning that he, like Parker, was a relatively standard-issue GAO employee with little to no public, let alone political, profile.

The third staffer working on this report was attorney Harry S. Barger. Before and after working for the GAO, his employment history included political entities hostile to the New Deal. He had initially been hired by the U.S. Justice Department during President Hoover’s administration. Then, FDR’s new Attorney General relieved Barger of the main case he was working on, claiming that Barger had bungled its prosecution, and asked him to resign (Associated Press, 1933). From 1934 to mid-1938, he worked as an investigator for two units of the Interior Department (US House, 1943a, p. 226). After the GAO training report had been released, the Interior claimed Barger “was involuntarily separated from the service. After his dismissal, this gentleman filed voluminous charges with the Department which, after careful investigation, were found to be without any basis in fact” (Fortas, 1940).

Before joining the GAO, Barger’s employment became more politically and ideologically oriented. In the fall of 1938, he worked for the Senate’s conservative-dominated Special Committee to Investigate Senatorial Campaign Expenditures and Use of Governmental Funds, i.e., the administration’s use of federal relief funds to help or hurt particular candidates. (This was the election when FDR tried to purge the Democratic Party of conservative senators and congressmen). According to a conservative reporter: “The report on the Tennessee situation, most sordid to reach Washington this year, was laid before the Senate committee investigating campaign expenditures by the committee’s special investigator, Harry S. Barger” (Fleming, 1938, p. 1).

In late 1938, he was hired by the GAO for its investigations division. The GAO quickly detailed him to the House Appropriations Committee to be an investigator for a subcommittee looking into conservative allegations of politics and misuse of federal funds by the WPA (US House, 1939b, p. 504). A headline from the conservative *Chicago Tribune* gave a sense of the committee’s focus: “Tennessee WPA scandal found true by inquiry” (Edwards, 1939). In 1942, the GAO lent him to the House Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee to head an investigation of wartime shipbuilding contracts (US House, 1943a, pp. 201–202).

Barger left GAO in mid-1943 and was hired as the chief investigator and assistant general counsel for the House Special Committee to Investigate the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Its thesis was that the FDR administration bent FCC’s radio regulatory powers for political benefit (US House, 1943b, pp. 94–95).<sup>21</sup> By 1948, he was back working for the House Appropriations Committee (US House, 1948, p. 86). The next year, he began working for the nonprofit National Economic Council, Inc. to lobby for very conservative causes (US House, 1949, pp. 159–60). For example, in 1950, he testified against ratification of the Genocide Convention (US Senate, 1950, pp. 302–308). Kampmark characterized his testimony as fearing “the invasion of Orwellian thought-police controlling the mode of speech and manner of social interaction” within the United States (2005, p. 94). Barger died in 1954 (“Harry S. Barger,” 1954).

## **Media Coverage**

The release of the GAO report triggered modest reporting in newspapers that covered capital news intensely. While not rising to the level of a national story, the topic was more of an “inside baseball” kind of story of high interest to DC-oriented readers. For *The Washington Post*, it was front-page news. The lead paragraph crystalized the content and tone of the report: “The Department of Agriculture’s graduate school and similar intra-governmental institutions for the advancement of learning among federal employees [sic] lack full authority of law and fail to account for funds obtained in tuitions and fees,” it said (“Report Hits Agriculture,” 1940, p. 1). *The Baltimore Sun*’s coverage had a distinctly negative slant: “New Deal departments and agencies, it was disclosed today, have built up within themselves one of the largest educational establishments in the country” (Trussell, 1940). The afternoon *Star* ran a reaction story, first summarizing the “critical” GAO report, but also a defense of the programs by the head of the USDA graduate school (“Graduate Schools,” 1940). Conservative Senator Frederick Van Nuys (D-IN) obliged a reporter writing a reaction story by saying that, based on the news coverage (he hadn’t read the report yet), he was concerned about the “scope” of educational activities revealed by the GAO and called for a Senate hearing to investigate the GAO’s charges (“Van Nuys Asks,” 1940). A few days later, the *Christian Science Monitor* asked: “Have government clerks, in building up the most extensive systems of ‘in service’ training in the country, carried their educational ambitions beyond legal limits?” (“Congress Urged to Limit,” 1940).

## **Congressional and Executive Reactions**

The GAO’s report had been addressed, as customary, to the Vice President (as Senate president) and the House Speaker. Following routine procedures, they referred the report to the committees with jurisdiction over the subject: The Senate and House Committees on Expenditures in the Executive Departments (86 *Cong. Rec.* 4464, 4466).

With the exception of Van Nuys’s immediate reaction supportive of the GAO, other congressional reactions were negative. John J. Cochran (D-MO), chair of the House committee the report was referred to, quickly attacked it. The day after the release of the report, he said on the floor of the House that the report was “plain political bunk.” Regarding the USDA graduate school, he said this “is the first time the school has ever been subject to any criticism.” The stenographer then inserted “[Applause]” after that statement, indicating that FDR’s supporters in the House agreed (86 *Cong. Rec.* 4587–88). Cochran also inserted in the *Congressional Record* materials from 1931 justifying the USDA graduate school as a way to demonstrate that it was a long-standing institution and, impliedly, had nothing to do with any political or ideological controversies arising from the New Deal.

Over the next few weeks, he inserted additional detailed responses to the GAO report that he received from NLRB, USDA, and CSC objecting both to factual errors in the report as well as its misleading characterizations (86 *Cong. Rec.* 2419, 2947–48). In particular, Winston Stephens, the CSC’s training director, objected to just about everything attributed to him in the summary portion of the Facts section (pp. 11–12). Comments that the GAO purported to be his from the interview “are seriously at variance” with what he said and believed. The “portion of the report dealing with my interview by the investigators reveals a complete misunderstanding or misrepresentation of the views which I expressed in that interview.” His only explanation for what the GAO claimed he had said, given that the GAO staff did not take any notes during the interview, was that they were “colored by *someone else’s views* or information gained from other sources by the investigators” (Stephens, 1940, emphasis added).

The report's comments about the legal intern in the Interior Department triggered the strongest reactions. Ickes was unwilling to let the allegations go unanswered. In his diary, he fumed that the intern was being criticized even though he received no compensation and even had to pay his costs of living in Washington, DC. Ickes was particularly inflamed by the attack on Fortas, including the gratuitous reference to Mrs. Fortas also serving in a federal agency as a lawyer. He was insulted by the claim of Abe Fortas' "alleged connection with communistic groups. The whole thing was a base and untruthful political attack." Ickes was convinced that the report was intended to have a "political effect" on the administration. He also expressed his ongoing disappointment that "the president is trifling with this situation" of permitting a conservative ex-Congressman to serve indefinitely as Acting Comptroller General when it was clear that FDR's current appointee was in such ill health that he would never return to duty (Ickes, 1978, p. 4345). More publicly and a bit more politely, Ickes told the *Post* that the GAO had gone "outside the statues and far afield" when questioning the internship. It was "beyond" him to understand why the GAO did it (Ryan, 1940).

Parallel to Ickes's public statement, Fortas sent a formal departmental letter to Cochran rebutting point-by-point the mistakes and errors in the GAO's discussion of the legal intern. They included that the intern had already finished his assignment and was back at the University of Chicago Law School, that after returning to school he voluntarily wrote a helpful legal research paper for Fortas, that the GAO lacked jurisdiction to investigate the internship because no federal expenditures were involved, that the Bituminous Coal Act of 1937 explicitly authorized accepting voluntary and uncompensated services (50 *Stat.* 73), that Fortas was not on the American League for Peace and Democracy membership and mailing list released by the House Committee on Un-American Activities, and that the report's reference to the International Juridical Association was "utterly immaterial and irrelevant to the subject matter" (Fortas, 1940).

Then, nothing happened. On April 25, Senator Van Nuys asked members of the Senate Committee if they supported holding a public hearing to discuss the report (Ryan, 1940).<sup>22</sup> Evidently the answer was negative, because it did not occur. Similarly, Cochran never held a House hearing on the report, content to insert agency rebuttals in the *Congressional Record*. In June, conservative Congressman Dewey Short (R-MO), in an aside during a floor speech on a military spending bill, referred to the GAO report and said that despite the subsequent attacks on it, he was "sure it is complete and accurate" (86 *Cong. Rec.* 7893).

The audit faded in importance rather quickly in mainstream news outlets. In September, when the USDA graduate school announced that it was initiating more courses relating to national defense, the *Post* coverage reminded readers of the GAO's "attack" on the school and other training programs back in April, but otherwise focused on the new offerings themselves (DeVore, 1940). When the GAO report was released, the U.S. Office of Education's widely circulated monthly *School Life* was in the midst of an 11-part series on educational programs in federal agencies. Three months after the report, it published the installment on USDA training. The article included a detailed summary of the operations of the graduate school and wholly ignored the GAO report, other than making a point that it was "a nonprofit institution" (John, 1940, p. 298).

On the other hand, the GAO report continued as grist for the conservative mill for the next year. In June 1941, during a floor debate, Congressman George Tinkham (R-GA) mentioned the GAO's assertion that there was a tie-in between the graduate school and Union Now. Therefore, he said, "The time has come to cleanse the United States government of those seditious individuals, particularly those in high places, who would destroy the independence of the United



States, subvert her national integrity, and nullify her constitution” (87 *Cong. Rec.* 5266). A few months later, the newsletter of the isolationist America First Committee cited the GAO report as evidence that FDR supported Streit’s Union Now movement (America First, 1941). Similarly, the conservative *National Republic* told readers that “Congressional investigation...disclosed that certain departments have been issuing, as study material for government employes [*sic*], ‘Union Now’ lectures” (Steele, 1941, p. 2).

After that, the report largely disappeared from political and media attention to become a historical curiosity and relic. Time and practice, the new leadership at the GAO, and the national defense mobilization had passed it by.

## **Conclusion**

The GAO report criticizing agency training programs can be analyzed in the context of the politics of its time. First, as Ickes complained in his diary, it was released during a parlous political moment. In the spring of 1940, FDR was keeping his options open about running for an unprecedented third term. Even if he stepped down, conservatives and Republicans were in heat to win back the White House and dismantle FDR’s legacy of big government as quickly and completely as possible. The anti-training report was one small piece in a larger mosaic of the ideological critique of FDR’s expansive approach to public administration.

Second, the report came out after the beginning of WWII in Europe (Pearl Harbor was more than 1½ years away). Isolationism was at a fervent high. Perhaps the minor subject of expanding training by the federal government invisibly invoked a larger dread of what a national mobilization to fight an external threat would include. Training, after all, was a central element of the military, such as basic training for draftees, training maneuvers, and trainer airplanes. At the time, there were vehement arguments about enacting a peacetime draft (Congress passed it later that year, in September). Perhaps, if viewed as a dog whistle for something else, the attack on civilian training programs was a reflexive viewpoint of isolationism and neutrality. The political and ideological logic may have been that *nobody* in the federal government needed training as long as the country stuck to Fortress America.

Third, the report seems like a warm-up exercise for the methods of political attack on so-called un-American activities. The audit has many examples of what was gradually perfected over the next decade: insinuation, guilt by association, suspicion, accusations without proof, sinister inferences, innuendo, and disregard for accuracy. It was a toxic brew, unbecoming of the GAO as a fact-based accounting agency.

More generally, the story of the 1940 GAO attack on agency training vividly reconnects the twenty-first century observer to how threatening a Brownlovian public administration looked to small government conservatives. It illustrates how modern public administration was an ideological threat and competitor to pre-FDR norms. Administrative management, the term used by the Brownlow Committee, was much more than merely a reshuffling of organization charts to reorganize the executive branch. Rather, it presented a new paradigm for the unelected side of government, with internal logic, values, and imperatives. For example, the committee endorsed “modern types of management in National Government best fitted” for the times (US President’s Committee on Administrative Management, 1937, p. 2). Regarding personnel, “a thoroughgoing modernization and extension of personnel administration is required” (p. 7). That should include giving “particular attention to a number of important aspects of personnel

administration which are now inadequately performed. These include training within the [civil] service” (p. 10).

The GAO’s report can be seen as a rebuttal to the Brownlow Committee. It is sprinkled with comments opposing the new Brownlovian public administration in general and, more specifically, any broader approach to personnel management, including training. For example, the report criticized:

- “the so-called changes generally claimed to be taking place in government and human affairs” (US Senate, 1940, p. 2)
- “the ultimate object of personnel administration forces is to bring about” major changes in the status quo (p. 10)
- the “new personnel management set-up” as different from traditional approaches (p. 11)
- USDA’s broad approach to personnel management and training by relying on “the supposed authority” in some laws for the statutory legitimacy of the graduate school as well as citing a mere presidential executive order to “claim additional authority” to operate the school (pp. 1–2)
- agencies “indulging” in “so-call ‘internships’” (p. 5)
- course instructors who follow “certain lines of teaching and activities” (p. 12)

To suspicious outsiders, big government—including the seemingly minor detail of in-house training—was an existential threat. No wonder the conservative rhetoric was so over-the-top against it. To them, it looked like the outcropping of a bigger and more radical revolution in the public sector rooted in the Brownlow Committee. As a legislative agency, the GAO was generally susceptible to the viewpoint of Congress’s dominant conservative coalition. More particularly, at the time of this report, it was led by a former conservative Republican member of the House and one of three GAO investigators was a conservative activist. In that context, the GAO report embodied the remnants of a romanticized view of the good ol’ days of small nineteenth century government. The GAO’s criticism of agency training programs was perhaps akin to the scream of the *ancién regime* engaging in a rearguard attempt to hold back the tsunami of big bureaucracy.

## Notes

1. In 2004, the GAO’s full name was changed from General Accounting Office (established 1921) to Government Accountability Office.
2. The three members of the President’s Committee on Administrative Management had participated in this study. Louis Brownlow and Charles E. Merriam served on the commission and Luther Gulick was its staff director.
3. Brownlow chaired the conference and Gulick was one of the invitees. However, the conference focused more on pre-employment university-based training programs in public administration and on unpaid internships sponsored by appropriate nonprofits. Indicating the underwriting of the conference, invitees included Stacy May of the Rockefeller Foundation and Guy Moffett of the Rockefeller-related Spelman Fund.
4. To qualify for hiring as a special agent of the FBI, the applicant had to be either a lawyer or accountant.
5. Similarly, and perhaps for the same reason, the president was content to let Treasury official Daniel W. Bell serve as acting director of the Bureau of the Budget (BOB) from 1934 to 1939.

6. While all this was happening, FDR was running for an unprecedented third term. Had he lost to Willkie, Warren would have already begun a 15-year term before Willkie's inauguration, saddling Republicans with a Democratic Comptroller General.
7. The statutory rationale was so that the GAO could, on its own initiative, make recommendations for "greater economy or efficiency in public expenditures" (42 *Stat.* 26). However, this report did not focus on that very specific legal standard with any great emphasis. At the time, critics of the report did not make the argument that the report went beyond the delegation of power to the GAO in the law—an argument that would have turned the tables on the GAO, given how frequently it based its decisions against agency training on a narrow interpretation of statutory language.
8. Occurring five years before the GAO audit, this published version of Stockberger's presentation to the 1935 training conference appears nonetheless to have been carefully edited and worded to avoid giving ammunition to the school's ongoing critics.
9. White was on leave from the University of Chicago's Political Science Department to serve on the three-member CSC. He had been appointed by FDR in 1934 to serve in the slot designated for the minority party, i.e., as a Republican.
10. The off-the-record transcript was considered confidential and only 71 copies were circulated. Copy #59, sent to BOB Director Harold Smith (who attended), is in the Hathi Trust online collection. The formal conference report (Lambie, 1935) was a sanitized version of the proceedings.
11. In this initial listing of course titles (another list was on pp. 13–14), the GAO included the names of only two instructors, Mordecai Ezekiel and David Ziskind. That both names sounded Jewish suggests subtle anti-Semitism. Ezekiel had a Ph.D. from Brookings and was an economist at the USDA. Ziskind, a lawyer at the Department of Labor, had a Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University.
12. Administrative management was the term used and pushed by the Brownlow Committee.
13. The second listing of courses duplicated some previously listed on pp. 11–12. Particularly odd was that this listing not only included "Economics of Instability" again, but listed it twice—once without naming the instructor and, separated by only one other course title, again with Ezekiel's name. This not only indicated sloppy editing, but also a data dump by the GAO staffers of everything they had into the Facts section.
14. Based on information on the inside title page, the booklet was distributed to federal personnel officers on the mailing list of the Society for Personnel Administration's bulletin, most of them in the capital.
15. Davenport, a former political science professor and former congressman (R-NY), had also been appointed by FDR to chair the new Council of Personnel Administration.
16. The GAO also misstated which federal agency published the reference book *US Government Manual*. The report said it was issued by the "successor" agency to the National Resources Board (p. 6). This was the National Resources Planning Board, a unit in the new Executive Office of the President, established by FDR in 1939. Rather, the *Manual* was published by the Office of Government Reports, a different agency in the Executive Office of the President, also created in the fall of 1939. Correct publication information about the *Manual* would have been easily available to the authors of the GAO report, including updated editions released in October of 1939 and February of 1940. The conservative coalition particularly despised the idea of government planning, likening it to communism. The gratuitous and mistaken reference to the planning board demonstrates the lengths the GAO would go to discredit training programs.
17. In those days, there was not a standard spelling for internship.
18. In 1945, it became a permanent standing committee and renamed the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC).

19. The list was published as part of the record of a committee public hearing on October 25, 1939 (US House, 1940b, p. 6404–17). However, the published version of the hearing omitted a disputatious discussion amongst committee members about the propriety of making the list public. For the deleted portion, see 85 *Cong. Rec.* 1034–35 (1940). Later that day, on the floor of the House, a Republican member asked for unanimous consent to insert the list in the *Congressional Record*, but a Democratic member objected (*ibid.*, 879). The list was published the next day by the conservative *Washington Times-Herald* (“List of Names,” October 26, 1939, p. 19). The GAO also mistakenly claimed that Thomas Emerson, NLRB’s assistant general counsel, was on the list (p. 6).
20. The report doubly erred. It misspelled the maiden name of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Sr.: Spelman. Also, there never was a Spelman *Foundation*. After her death in 1915, her widower established the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial. In 1929, several family-related charitable activities, including the Spelman Memorial, were merged into the Rockefeller Foundation. Before disbanding, the memorial allocated \$10 million to a new Spelman Fund of New York. The latter organization funded many projects related to the professionalization of public administration, including NIPA. The fund dissolved in 1948, when it had distributed all its money.
21. The committee’s general counsel in 1944, and Barger’s boss, was John J. Sirica, famous in the 1970s as the federal district judge at the trial of the Watergate burglars.
22. Apparently, it was Van Nuys who arranged for the report to be published (US Senate, 1940). It was not published by the House, probably because Cochran did not request it.

## Disclosure Statement

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