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Background

For its first hundred years, U.S. government publication suffered from the absence of thought sympathetic to its development. In the Founding and Federalist periods, prevailing Anglo-Saxon ideas and traditions kept government shielded from public scrutiny. Until 1795, the Senate chose not to admit the public, nor even members of the House, to its proceedings; it made no provision for the publication of its proceedings. The House entrusted its proceedings to the press, which recorded them incompletely, tendentiously, and often erroneously [1].

In this early period, government was not particularly forthcoming with printed information about itself. Its reticence derived largely from the political culture of the ruling elite, who held the general public in low regard, as neither worthy nor entitled to receive government information. An oral tradition, to which this early period clung, further inhibited the development of government publication [2].

Government publication fared little better in the antebellum period. In this period, the dominant political thought contained a strong leveling component that rehabilitated, even exalted, the common man. The Jeffersonian Republicans, but particularly the Jacksonian Democrats, deemed plain folk not only worthy of government information but also eminently qualified to govern the nation. By rehabilitating the common man, antebellum political thought provided a public for public information, which fostered the development of government
publication. Yet, as it exalted common men, thereby stimulating an audience for government information, another of its salient ideological components served to sharply curtail the supply.

Antebellum political thought enshrined the doctrine of the negative state. This prevailing anti-statist ideology impeded government publication in two important ways. First, it kept government diminished and inactive, thereby inhibiting the establishment of bureaus and in turn opportunities for publication. Second, on those infrequent occasions when government exerted itself and sought to report on its exertions, anti-statism frequently impelled government to seek non-governmental avenues of publication. For many decades Congress chose to publish its proceedings through private, yet devotedly loyal, newspapers. By favoring private over governmental publication, Congress not only rewarded party loyalists in the press, but also served the ideology of the minimalist state.

The material conditions of pre-industrial America reinforced prevailing political thought to render government inactive. An agrarian society with a simple economy required little government. Abundant natural resources fostered individualism and inhibited the development of government’s regulative arm.

Such a society embraced the anti-statist, anti-institutionalist elements of Thomas Jefferson’s thought. “Were it made a question,” Jefferson asserted, “whether no law, as among the savage Americans, or too much law, as among the civilized Europeans, submits man to the greatest evil, one who has seen both conditions of existence would pronounce it to the last” [3]. “Our general government,” Jefferson asserted in 1795, “may be reduced to a very simple organization, and very inexpensive one; a few plain duties to be performed by a few servants”[4]. For Jefferson and the antebellum democrats who succeeded him, government served no legitimate purpose beyond policing and providing for the national defense. In its first
hundred years, American political science revered the kind of government that Thomas Carlyle
derisively described as “anarchy plus a street constable” [5]. According to prevailing political
doctrine, an inactive government, which by virtue of its inactivity demonstrated impartiality,
supported the antebellum desideratum of equal political rights. Thus, antebellum political
thought revered government that governed least. In accord with these Jeffersonian tenets, the
U.S. government governed very little for much of the nineteenth century. Citizens generally
demonstrated a corresponding indifference to politics. In accounting for the apathy surrounding
the national election of 1884, Isaac Macveagh asserted “that the average American citizen cares
very little about politics...because the government under which he lives touches his life very
rarely, and only at points of very little importance to him [6].

It seems perfectly fitting that the Congressional Globe bore the motto “the world is
governed too much,” for it not only captured the prevailing political thinking of the day but also
reflected the undeveloped state of U.S. government publication. Making the Globe’s motto even
more felicitously expressed was that the Globe, which accounted for the bulk of governmental
literature at that time, was not even governmentally but privately published.

The dominant antebellum doctrine of Natural Rights served as the ideological
underpinning of the negative state. In essence, it advanced, as an immutable principle, the idea
that nature endowed mankind with such inalienable rights as life, liberty, and property.
Government existed solely to protect these. Beyond embracing this eternal verity, there was
little knowledge left to imbibe, according to Natural Rights theory, and even less to gather in the
field of political economy. Natural Rights were understood not through investigating and
scientific testing, the kinds of activities that culminate in publication, but simply through reason.
For George Bancroft not reason but a generous God impressed these truths on the hearts of all
men. “The gift of feeling moral truth, of which political science is a branch,” George Bancroft asserted, “was rightly declared by our fathers to be from God...It is not a thing that belongs to reason; it depends on the sense of the heart. The evidence that is this way obtained, is vastly better and more satisfying than all that can be obtained by the arguing of those that are most learned and greatest masters of reason; it is far more excellent than all the knowledge of the greatest philosophers and statesmen. And babes are as capable of knowing these things as the wise and prudent” [7].

This widely held nineteenth century belief in Natural Rights, which professed to contain all great political and social truths, and which pronounced them as fixed and final, deprived government of a stimulus necessary to advance knowledge in political economy, or in any other of the social sciences. Natural Rights inhibited government as much from gathering knowledge as from exercising power.

Another aspect of antebellum thought, particularly as Jefferson and Bancroft expressed it, tended to diminish governmental activities designed to maintain and preserve its historical record. They advocated a transitoriness to all things governmental and suggested an irreverence for the past. “The earth, Jefferson wrote in 1813, “belongs to the living, not the dead.” As for political science, Jefferson traced its origins to the principle of representative democracy, rendering “useless almost everything written before on the structure of government; and, in a great measure, relieves our regret, if the political writings Aristotle, or of any other ancient, have been lost” [8].

For George Bancroft, legislative statutes, including all the activity surrounding them, had a short shelf life. “Democracy knows nothing, recognizes nothing, as a perpetuity,” Bancroft wrote, “but the law of God.” “All the forms and enactments of legislation are the work of man’s
hand, and are perishable like man” [9]. Jefferson calculated this shelf life not to exceed “19 or 20 years,” at which point each succeeding generation had “a right to choose for itself the form of government it believes the most promotive of its own happiness” [10].

The consequences of such thinking provided considerable bemusement for perceptive foreign observer Alexis de Tocqueville. For Tocqueville, the institutional memory of the U.S. government failed to survive beyond an election cycle, after which nearly all had been forgotten, because so little had been recorded. “The proceedings of American society”, Tocqueville observed, “leave fewer traces than do events in a private family.” “Nothing is written,” Tocqueville further asserted, “or if it is, the slightest gust of wind carries it off.” According to Tocqueville, newspapers constituted the “only historical records in the United States” [11].

The political thought of Jefferson and Bancroft contributed to the undeveloped state of U.S. government publication, particularly to its preservation component. Much as the current period has been marked by the absence of governmental initiatives to preserve electronic government documents, antebellum political thought demonstrated a disregard for maintaining an historical record and for developing an institutional memory.

Despite these ideological constraints, Antebellum political thought was not altogether injurious to government publication. A decidedly utilitarian view of science, sharpened by the presence of a vast and undeveloped frontier, stimulated governmental activity in certain of the sciences. For much of the nineteenth century, the U.S. government generally initiated and sponsored only those scientific endeavors that had immediate and practical utility, tending to for sake activities that sought to increase knowledge for its own sake. Antebellum thought tended “to downgrade pure intellectual curiosity” [12]
Thus, government research weighed heavily toward the applied sciences, most notably in efforts designed to exploit the nation’s agricultural and mineral wealth. Even as these activities resulted in many fine governmental studies, the emphasis on utility and immediacy may have contributed to the government’s perfunctory attitude toward preserving even its scientific research, just as a short term and dismissive attitude toward governmental institutions proved unfavorable to preserving a full record of the government’s legislative and administrative business.

Even in applied science investigations, congressional detractors, and other such champions of limited government, sought to retrench, if not to eliminate altogether, such activities. In 1885, representative Hilary Herbert (D-Alabama) tried to curtail the activities of the U.S. Geological Survey, singling out as superfluous several of its publications, including the King, Becker, Lord, and Church studies on the Comstock lode. A sympathetic and famous scientist, Alexander Agassiz, supported Herbert’s attempt to undermine John Wesley Powell and his geologic bureau [13]. Agassiz dismissed the governmentally produced works on the Comstock lode, asserting that “private individuals have learned nothing” from them [14]. In this sphere, as in most others, Agassiz saw no role for government publication. All such studies Agassiz assigned to “the province of private historians” [15].

Did Congress intend, Herbert rhetorically asked, “to commit to this bureau work which could be as well done, and which, as professor Agassiz says, would be done more cheaply by private individuals” [16]? Herbert saw no publishing role for government beyond collecting data. Such market forces as private scholars and publishing houses should, according to Herbert, perform the printing and distributing. Toward Eliot Lord’s governmentally published study, *Comstock Mining and Miners*, Herbert cast the following aspersions:
...it proceeds very much like Twain’s “Roughing It.” The only difference between this and Twain’s book is that Twain wrote his book to be bought and read by the people; and the people did buy and read it. The people paid for Lord’s book and did not read it [17].

Private publishers, such as Richard Rothwell, sought to place more strictures on governmental publishing than even Herbert. “I do not think the government ought to go into the business of publishing,” Rothwell told the House Committee on Appropriations in 1895 [18]. Editor of the *Engineering and Mining Journal*, which sought to eclipse the USGS’ *Mineral Resources of the United States*, Rothwell contended that the USGS “had no business collecting statistics of such things as copper refining, and making market reports on metal or chemicals” [19]. The USGS, Rothwell informed John Wesley Powell, “ought to go into the market and buy those statistics when it wanted them” [20].

Edward Youmans, influential publisher of *The Popular Science Monthly* and devout anti-statist, added his criticisms to those of Agassiz and Herbert. Youmans denounced the federal scientific establishment for competing with private investigators, and for expending “millions of money...on investigations of all kinds...and publications made at extravagant cost, and which are without the necessity of warrant which should be the sole reason of any scientific undertaking by the state” [21].

These attacks elicited a spirited response from John Wesley Powell. His response revealed an emergent esprit de corp among governmental scientists, who formed an intellectual elite in Washington, D.C. after the Civil War. In 1886, Washington DC claimed more distinguished scientists than any other city in the United States [22].
Many had fought in the Civil War, which imbued these scientists with a sense of nationalism and public service, mitigating the crass individualism that antebellum political thought had engendered. The Civil War inspired physician John William Draper to call for the abandonment of individual pursuits in favor of service to the state [23]. Powell was among those answering the call.

Unlike Agassiz, who derided the government’s scientific work as he argued in favor of turning it over to private individuals such as himself, Powell trumpeted the superiority of government science. “A hundred millionaires,” Powell declared, “could not do the work in scientific research now done by the general government” [24]. Of the government scientists whose works Herbert had singled out as unworthy of publication, Powell contended that “their contributions to science constitute a library of knowledge...given to the world with the sanction of the government of the United States,” and that their names “are forever engraved in the literature of the country” [25].

Of particular interest are Powell’s remarks in decisive favor of government publication. Powell rejected publication through scientific journals as “exceedingly fragmental and imperfect,” and therefore “erroneous” [26]. To government publication, Powell, by contrast, ascribed the “great systematic treatises on geology and palenotology” [27].

Powell’s fidelity to government science, as well as his predilection for government publication, were widely shared throughout Washington’s scientific establishment, and seem to have been sustained until WWII. In its landmark study of 1938, the Commission on Natural Resources reported that government scientists, for essentially the reasons that Powell enumerated, expressed a strong bias in favor of government publication [28].
As applied to programs involving research and publication, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), like Powell, resisted the ideology of limited government. Designed specifically “to acquire and disseminate useful information on subjects connected with agriculture,” the USDA, even under the leadership of those who adhered to minimalist state principles, conducted ambitious programs of research and publication [29].

In 1895, Secretary Sterling Morton, a proponent of limited government, is reported to have said that “if the department of agriculture is to be conducted in the spirit of paternalism the sooner it is abolished the better” [30]. Even while imposing departmental economies, including paring back the popular program of distributing seeds, Morton nevertheless always spared research and publication. “If, in a paternal sort of way,” Morton asked, “it is the duty of government to distribute anything gratuitously, are not new ideas of more permanent value than old seeds” [31]. One such USDA idea, published in a Bureau of Animal Industry Circular and valued at $40 million a year, linked the tick to Texas Fever [32].

Morton, for one, was willing to forsake deeply held ideological beliefs in favor of advancing scientific publication. “Despite the dominant interest of many congressmen in the free distribution of seeds to their constituents,” Leonard White asserts, “the departmental [USDA] personnel was predominantly concerned with science, not seeds; with experimentation, not partisanship; with long-run not merely immediate gains” [33]. In effect, they were tending toward an ideology favorable to the development of U.S. government publication. Like Powell, evidence suggests that USDA officials favored not just publication generally but government publication particularly. From 1891-1910, for example, Wilbur Atwater, the first chief of the Office of Experiment Stations, authored at least 21 studies that the U.S. Government Printing
Office printed and distributed. During the same period, Bernard Fernow, Chief of the Division of Forestry, authored at least 12 governmentally published studies [34].

**Social Darwinism**

As Powell defended the work of his bureau and its method of publication, a new current of thought reinforced the old ideology of governmental inactivity. Even more forcefully than the doctrine of Natural Rights, a Darwinian derived Sociology, which Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner most persuasively articulated, impeded the establishment of new publishing bureaus, particularly in areas involving the public’s health and welfare.

Social Darwinism professed that society evolved only if natural forces, such as the marketplace, were free to develop unimpededly. Poverty, hunger, unemployment, illiteracy, according to this creed, were endemic to the social organism, unfortunate consequences in the struggle for existence but necessary in weeding out the unfit. Artificial forces, particularly those of a highly politicized variety, exerted themselves with the inevitable result of retarding progress. Thus, Social Darwinism deemed undesirable all governmental efforts to intervene in the industrial sphere. As for the ability of government to remedy these ills, Herbert Spencer asserted, “No power on earth, no cunningly devised laws of statesman, no world rectifying schemes of the humane, no communist panaceas, no reforms that men ever did broach or ever will broach, can diminish them one jot” [35]. However well intentioned, a government bent on remedying social ills, according to Sumner, produced only “confusion, error, mischief, and loss” [36]. “The first instinct of the modern man,” Sumner wrote, “is to get a law passed to forbid or prevent that, in his wisdom, he disapproves.” “A thing which is inevitable, however, is one
which we cannot control.” “We have to make up our minds to it, adjust ourselves to it, and sit down to live with it” [37]. In addition, therefore, to having no effect, or perhaps even generating unintended consequences, governmental initiatives designed to ameliorate problems attendant to the industrial revolution-- whether they be to redistribute wealth through social legislation or to establish bureaus designed to redress these problems--threatened to undermine progress by deflecting natural forces from their predetermined path.

This widely embraced late nineteenth century strand of American political thought was thoroughly inimical to government publication. Like no other component of American political thought, Social Darwinism, as Spencer and Sumner expressed it, deprived government of intellectual enterprise. Their science of society demanded not only that government be inert, but that it also be bereft of all cognitive powers. For most Social Darwinians, a government that planned implied a government bent on tinkering with natural forces. Thus, the ideal government, in this decidedly deterministic ideological scheme, was one devoid not only of energy but also one disinclined to undertake activities that underpin the planning process, specifically inquiring, investigating, and reporting. “The current popular notion that we have democratic institutions because the men of the eighteenth century were wise enough to choose and create them is entirely erroneous,” Sumner asserted. “We have not made America; America has made us” [38].

In another strident expression of determinism that dismissed the idea of government bringing to bear its collective intelligence to advance social progress, Sumner wrote, “the peace, order, security, and freedom from care of modern civilized life are not the product of human resolutions; they are due at least to economic forces, which, by expanding the conditions of human existence during the last three hundred years, have made all which we possess possible” [39]. As proof that government was singularly unfit as an agent of progress, Sumner directed his
readers to examine the *Congressional Record*, “as if every page did not reveal the sordidness of the plans and motives by which it is all controlled” [40].

Like the Natural Rights democrats of the antebellum period, Social Darwinists ascribed no role to government beyond maintaining order and security; more specifically, for Sumner, this meant defending the “property of men and the honor of women” [41]. “Perpetually,” Herbert Spencer asserted, “governments have thwarted and deranged the growth, but have in no way furthered it, save by partially discharging their proper function and maintaining social order” [42].

Thus, Social Darwinism sought to deprive government of its ability to investigate, shape, regulate, and ameliorate, largely because it deemed government an influence pernicious to the development of the social organism. For Sumner and Spencer, “nonpolitical automatic organs of society,” such as the market place, represented the only true agents of progress [43]. Only in “renouncing” itself was government, according to Sumner, capable of intelligent expression [44].

Sociologists Michael Lacey and Mary O’ Furner assert that “governments must know in order to act” [45]. Governmental initiatives must be informed by a continuous program of scientific investigation. Such thinking, which fosters an environment favorable to government publication, stands in stark contrast with Social Darwinism, which intends, above all, to keep government from knowing as well as from acting. Social Darwinism had as little use for a government that gathered knowledge as the Natural Rights theory had for one that possessed energy. These twin towers of the negative state, Social Darwinism and Natural Rights, undoubtedly stunted the growth of government publication. Yet it is difficult to imagine a doctrine more singularly stultifying to its development than the Social Darwinism of Spencer and Sumner, which purposely sought to render government not only heartless, but also thoughtless.
LESTER FRANK WARD

In the 1880s, as Social Darwinism reached its apex of popularity in the United States, a Civil War veteran struck a decisive blow against it. Challenging the inviolability of the natural forces so revered by Spencer and Sumner, Lester Frank Ward contended that these were not only inferior but also amenable to the public intelligence. “We are told to let things alone,” Ward wrote of Spencer and Sumner, “and allow nature to take its course.” “But has intelligent man ever done this?” “Is not civilization itself with all that it has accomplished the result of man’s not letting things alone, and of his not letting nature take its course” [46]? “The normal working of things,” Ward asserted, “would never produce tools, weapons, clothing, or shelter” [47]. Ward denounced the negative political thinking of Spencer and Sumner as “a censure of the whole course of human history” [48]. The day has come, Ward declared, “for society to take its affairs into its own hands and shape its own destinies” [49]. In response to Spencer’s and Sumner’s gospel of inaction, Ward espoused the efficacy of governmental effort.

Ward belonged to the group of public spirited scientists that attached itself to the federal government after the Civil War. He worked as librarian of the United States Bureau of Statistics; and as paleobotantist for the Geological Survey under Powell, to whom Ward dedicated his first major work, *Dynamic Sociology*. At the same time, he won acclaim as a social scientist and established himself as the father of American sociology. Ward was, according to Henry Steele Commager, “one of the most variously learned scholars of his generation” [50]. In profundity of
thought, Commager pronounced Ward equal to William James, John Dewey, and Oliver Wendell Holmes, even eclipsing Henry Adams and Thorstein Veblen [51].

According to Ward, modern society suffered from too little government. As soldier and as federal employee, Ward perceived government not as a source of disdain and ridicule but clearly as a positive transforming agent. For Ward, progress engendered not from the unimpeded play of natural forces but by planned and purposeful activity designed to commandeer natural as well as social forces. To plan and direct such purposeful activity, Ward called upon “the brain or organ of consciousness of society,” which he deemed government [52]. The social intellect, Ward declared, “must be located in the governing body of society” [53].

In further contradistinction with the political thought of Spencer and Sumner, Ward conceived government not only as directing the social intellect but also as cultivating and informing it. As assiduously as Spencer and Sumner sought to extract the brain—and the heart—from government, Ward agitated for a stage of political development in which he envisioned government as a veritable machine for investigating and publishing. Ward proposed that “every movement of whatever nature going on in the country should be regularly reported to a central office, and all such facts should be there systematically elaborated and published in tables, charts, diagrams, etc” [54].

In this actively dynamic stage of political development, which Ward called Sociocracy, the federal establishment would be filled not so abundantly with statesmen and administrators as with skilled scientists bent primarily on investigating and ameliorating

Before progressive legislation can become a success, every legislature must become, as it were, a polytechnic school, a laboratory of philosophical research into the laws of society and of human nature. No legislator is qualified to propose or vote on measures designed
to affect the destinies of millions of social units until he masters all that is known of the
science of society. Every true legislator must be a sociologist [55].

As social scientists, legislators would devise methods of controlling “social forces,” as Ward
called them, “on exactly the same principles that an experiment or an inventor controls the forces
of physical nature” [56]. Their legislative measures would derive, according to Ward, not from
ignorance or special privilege but rather from “a series of exhaustive experiments on the part of
true scientific sociologists and sociological inventors working on the problems of social physics
from the practical point of view” [57].

In the U.S. congressional committee system, just then emerging as a device for exploring,
deliberating, and investigating, Ward found what most closely approximated his idea of a
legislative laboratory. The committee system employed scientific methods, unlike previous
congressional methods of conducting business, which eschewed deliberate thought. For
example, even as late as 1870 the process of appropriating public funds suffered from the
absence of hearings. Congress allocated funds without benefit of exchange between department
heads and congressional overseers, the sort of exchange that Ward believed stimulated discovery
in the social sciences. A contemporary critic complained that Congress served up legislative
measures devoid “of any official explanation of the theory and arguments upon which they are
based, or of their relations to the general plan of legislation”. “Under these circumstances,” he
continued, “what hope or prospect is there of any intelligent, comprehensive, and systematic
treatment of the great problems [58]. In the committee system, Ward found hope that
intelligence finally would be brought to bear on issues of public importance
Ward highly valued committee hearings, which legislative subject specialists presided over, and which imparted a wealth of diverse testimony. “Committee work,” Ward declared, “is...the nearest approach we have to the scientific investigation of social questions” [59]. Ward envisioned government in general, congressional committees in particular, as principal producer of social science research. His idealized government, so decidedly cerebral and so thoroughly engaged in scientific research, demanded an enormous program of publication, generated not just from agencies conducting research but also from agencies engaged in administrative functions, for Ward fully expected government to apply its findings.

As Henry Steele Commager has noted, the larger end of government, as Ward conceived it, “was the manufacture of intelligence” [60]. Indeed, Ward obligated government not only to manufacture intelligence but to disperse it widely. Like John Wesley Powell, Ward considered the intellectual product of government superior to that produced in the private sector. “If any one will take the trouble to examine the various reports published by the several executive departments of any government, ” Ward wrote, “and compare them with efforts of a like general nature made by individuals he will doubtless be willing to confess that the latter fall below the former in many important respects” [61].

John Dewey

In Lester Frank Ward, U.S. governmental research and literature finally found a champion. Other notable American thinkers followed Ward’s lead. Like Ward, John Dewey rejected truths as fixed and final, particularly in the political and social spheres. He, too, dismissed Social Darwinism and other systems of thought which emphasized the inevitability of
societal development and which, therefore, demanded an inactive government. Dewey, like Ward, embraced the efficacy of effort and the laboratory habit of mind. Both men exhorted government to direct activity aimed at subduing and controlling the environment. Dewey required government not merely to release citizens “from mechanical eternal constraint” but to feed and sustain citizens with knowledge generally, and with knowledge of public affairs in particular. [62].

Like Ward, Dewey lamented the emaciated body of social science, in stark contrast with the abundant stock of accumulated knowledge in the physical sciences. “The inchoate state of social knowledge, Dewey wrote, is reflected in the two fields where intelligence might be supposed to be most alert and most continuously active, education and the formation of social policies in legislation” [63]. As for the method of developing social knowledge, Dewey departed from Ward. Dewey considered it egregiously wrongheaded for government to refrain from exerting itself in the public sphere owing to a lack of supporting data. For Dewey such facts, which he denounced as a “miscellaneous pile of meaningless items,” failed to qualify as knowledge [64]. In Dewey’s scheme, knowledge originated only as society experimented with solving its problems. Thus, the very process of experimenting gave rise to a body of social science. “Our working principle,” Dewey wrote, “is to try, to find out by trying...It permits, sooner or later it may require, every alleged sacrosanct principle to submit to ordeal by fire—to trial by service rendered” [65].

Dewey’s development of, and emphasis on, experimental inquiry distinguished his thinking from Ward’s, and provided the ideology of U.S. government publication with a particularly potent stimulus. For Dewey, unlike Ward, knowledge resisted man’s full attainment; The best man can do, according to Dewey, is achieve a working knowledge which allows for...
further inquiry and stimulates additional working hypotheses. Thus, issues of public policy
defied final resolution and could be fixed only provisionally. Adopted measures of social
legislation, according to Dewey, demanded continuous amendment, thus stimulating unrelenting
inquiry and investigation. According to Dewey scholar Charles Hendel, “there is no fulfillment
in Dewey’s universe; one never possesses, but is always on the way to possess...the present is but
an instrument for the future and the future never comes...knowledge is never had, but is always
infinitely postponed; what we can have in the present in an hypothesis or theory the meaning and
justification of which always lies in the future” [66].

In Dewey’s scheme, even more so than in Ward’s, government is engaged in continuous
research, directed not only toward emerging problems, but also continuously revisited upon
measures already adopted. The problem of knowledge, Dewey wrote, “is a problem never ended,
always in process; one problematic situation is resolved and another takes its place” [67].

Herbert Croly

Not unlike The Wizard of Oz, Ward and Dewey found government in need of a brain
and each provided one. Ward made government society’s chief thinker. Dewey compelled
government to think continuously. Herbert Croly also fashioned an active and thoughtful
government, the kind of government necessary to fulfill the promise of American life, which
Croly believed could be consummated only by adding a heavy dose of Hamiltonian nationalism
to Jeffersonian egalitarianism. In the energetic Presidency of Theodore Roosevelt, which
expanded and enthusiastically exercised the powers of government, Croly perceived just such a
marriage of nationalism with democracy. As President, Theodore Roosevelt institutionalized
Ward’s belief in the efficacy of governmental effort, which Croly shared. “We can no longer,” Croly wrote, “treat life as something that has trickled down to us” [68]. Nor could reformers adhere “to the stupefying rule that the good fathers of the republic relieved their children from the necessity of vigorous, independent, or consistent thinking in political matters,—that it is the duty of their loyal children to repeat the sacred words and then await a miraculous consummation of individual and social prosperity” [69]. Croly, Like Ward and Dewey, shunned notions of inevitabilities and fixed finalities in favor of the potentialities of effort and scientific research. “A new experiment must be made,” Croly wrote in reference to what he considered the failed political and economic organization of the antebellum democrats. “The great value of this new experiment,” Croly continued, “would derive from the implied intellectual and moral emancipation” [70].

In urging government to adopt an experimental approach in addressing issues of public policy, Croly, like Dewey, required government to engage in continuous research. “These experiments,” Croly wrote, “must be indefinitely continued, their lessons candidly learned, and the succeeding experiments based upon past failures and achievements” [71]. “The nation, like the individual,” Croly wrote, in another Dewey-like passage, “must go to school; and the national school is not a lecture hall or a library; its schooling consists chiefly in experimental collective action aimed at the realization of the collective purpose” [72].

Unlike Ward and Dewey, however, Croly emphasized the importance of elevating the thinking of government, which he and Tocqueville believed had been diminished owing to the egalitarian legacy of Jefferson and Jackson. “By the ‘people’ Jefferson and his followers,” according to Croly, “have never meant all the people or the people as a whole,” but “a sort of apotheosized majority—the people in so far as they could be generalized and reduced to an
average” [73]. “Jefferson,” Croly wrote, “refused as far as he could, to endow special men...with any opportunity to promote the public welfare proportionate to their abilities” [74].

To such thinking, which he excoriated and which Tocqueville had lamented, Croly attributed what he perceived as the puny stature of U.S. civil servants. He argued in favor of making room in government for persons of superior talents and abilities. Croly forcefully advanced the Progressive idea that there was not a Democratic or Republican way to “sweep a street” or prepare a governmental report, but only a “best way–precise, expert, and scientific” [75]. In this way, Croly’s thought served to improve the quality of U.S. government publication.

Conclusion

For much of this one hundred year period, American political thought largely rejected an ideology favorable to government publication. The doctrine of natural rights, which revered the individual and pilloried the state, kept government small and inactive. Holding as immutable a few simple political truths, while contending that even children could easily comprehend them, Natural Rights tended to discourage research in the social sciences.

In Lester Frank Ward’s political thought government publication received its first solid ideological underpinning. Quite unlike the proponents of Natural Rights and Social Darwinism, Ward required government to think and to act. Ward’s thought contained all elements necessary to sustain an active program of government publication. He unabashedly favored an active state, even when it was unpopular to do so. He gave government an expansive jurisdiction and urged it to address all problems in its purview. Even beyond requiring an energetic government, Ward
ascribed to government the role of society’s chief cognitive power, calling on government to study social phenomena and to fill its ranks with social scientists trained in Ward’s proposed national university.

John Dewey expanded even further the generous role that Ward had carved out for government as investigator and publisher. For Dewey government research, indeed all research in the social sciences, was constitutionally incapable of culmination. Thus, Dewey envisioned government as inexorably engaged in pursuing that which can never fully be possessed. Dewey’s scheme demanded a particularly ambitious program of governmental research and publication.

For the ideology of U.S. government publication, Herbert Croly’s elitism provided an antidote to the egalitarianism of antebellum political thought. In calling for experts, as opposed to partisans, to fill the ranks of governmental research agencies, Croly hoped for qualitative improvements in the civil service. These, in turn, would redound to the benefit of U.S. governmental literature.

Notes

4. Jefferson to D’Ivernois, 1795, in Democracy: By Thomas Jefferson, 47.


13. Ralph Gabriel writes that the establishment of the USGS had a double significance certain to embitter traditional democrats steeped in antistatism, such as Herbert. “...it marked a first step in the realization of the ideal of the public service state (as opposed to a mere police state), and it was a pioneer public effort in America to put science to work at the task of the amelioration of human life.” Ralph Henry Gabriel, *The Course of American Democratic Thought*, (New York: Greenwod Press, 1986), 184.


17. Herbert, *Congressional Record*, (June 29, 1886), vol. 17, pt. 6, 6297


24. *Testimony Before the Joint Commission to Consider the Present Organization of Certain Scientific Bureaus*, 1078. Congressional supporter of the geological survey, Representative George Symes (R-Colorado) described Agassiz as a “theoretical dreamer,” who, “would like to see every man that owns a mine hire scientists like him go out upon the public domain and be paid $1,000 or $5,000 for a theoretical guess before sinking a shaft.” Symes, 49th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record*, (29 June 1886), vol. 17, pt. 6, 6299.


33. White, *The Republican Era*, 243


69. Croly, *Promise of American Life*, 150
73. Croly, *Promise of American Life*, 188.