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## Echoes of the “Misfounding” of Public Administration: The Voices of Generation X

Gary S. Marshall

University of Nebraska at Omaha, gmarshall@unomaha.edu

Christine M. Reed

University of Nebraska at Omaha, creed@iunomaha.edu

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# Echoes of the “Misfounding” of Public Administration: The Voices of Generation X

By:

Gary S. Marshall and Christine Reed

University of Nebraska at Omaha

**Abstract:** This paper build on previous research into the "X Generation, " in particular their apparent cynicism about all theories of organization as being mere strategies of manipulation. Their voices were described in that study as "the voice of a new cohort of students that we will increasingly find in our classrooms" (Marshall, 1997). Current MPA students at the University of Nebraska at Omaha participated in focus group discussions designed to elicit information about their motivations for enrolling in our graduate program. Initial findings confirmed the organizational commitment of older age cohorts, as well as their identification with large governmental institutions. The younger cohort expressed significant public service idealism despite cynicism about large public bureaucracies. Neither the organizational commitment of the older students nor the idealism of the younger cohort were apparently related to whether they were currently working in the public service. Instead the differences seemed to be related to age and to their various formative social experiences. The "X'ers" had a coherent view of public service, although not the traditional one we know. Their skepticism about large-scale organizations was balanced by a commitment to participatory governance and to the idea of community.

## Introduction

This paper builds on previous research into the "X Generation," in particular their apparent cynicism about *all* theories of organization as being mere strategies of manipulation. Their voices were described in that study as "the voice of a new cohort of students that we will increasingly found in our classrooms" (Marshall, 1997). The major implication of research into a new cohort for public administration was that graduate students in our MPA programs seemed to lack the public service idealism and organizational commitment of earlier cohorts of MPA students. The purpose of our present study is to understand in greater depth the motivations of people entering MPA programs, particularly the younger age group we have called "Generation X ."

The initial findings of our study confirmed the organizational commitment of older age cohorts, as well as their identification with large governmental institutions; however, we were surprised by the public service idealism of the younger cohort despite their cynicism about large public bureaucracies. Neither the organizational commitment of the older students nor the idealism of the younger cohort were apparently related to whether they were currently working in the public service. Instead the differences seemed to be related to age and to their various formative social experiences. The "X' ers" had a coherent view of public service, although not the traditional one we know. Their skepticism about large-scale organizations was balanced by a commitment to participatory governance and to the idea of community. While they

struggled to clarify what the word "community" meant to them, they clearly identified themselves as public servants-as giving voice to members of their communities, especially the poor and disenfranchised.

### **The Anti-Federalists and Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century Public Administration**

For over two decades in public administration, an emphasis on the founding period of our country has called attention to the importance of the Federalist and Anti-Federalist traditions. The Anti-Federalist/Federalist debate pitted government by dialogue-the need for a community of meaning-on the one hand and against government by distant centralized authority-the objective control of administration-on the other.

The Anti-Federalist perspective based on the Rousseauian tradition, emphasized social dialogue and collaboration as a means for human interaction (McSwain, 1985). A good summary of this ethos is contained in the statement of George Mason during the debates over the legislative branch:

To make representation real and actual, the number of Representatives ought to be adequate; they ought to mix with the people, think as they think, feel as they feel, ought to be perfectly amenable to them, and thoroughly acquainted with their condition. (Rohr, 1986, p. 40)

In our interviews we found that the comments of students between the ages of 22 and 27 shared a concern for the idea of community and the idea of human relationship. Students unequivocally had a vision of public service that was consistent with the ethos of the Anti-Federalists. They identified three themes that are reflective of this ethos. The first, is a view of the state as an organic community which is intimately connected to its people. Second, is the importance of neighborhoods and the impact that geographical proximity has on the manner in which social issues are addressed. Third, is an increased use of "non-state" related avenues for dialogue, such as church groups, civic groups and other public forms of association. In a subsequent section of our paper, we will discuss the details of the student comments. We think these comments are important because they paint a significantly different picture of public administration than the picture held by the previous generation. The views of this younger generation will have an impact on the way we teach public administration and on the development of alternative forms of political association and governance.

#### *Voluntary Attachment to Government*

Any government must have the confidence of its people. This is a point that was agreed upon by both the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists (Storing, 1981; Wood, 1992). However, their interpretation of how that confidence is won, differs significantly. The Anti-Federalist viewpoint centers around the willingness of people to have a voluntary attachment to government. This attachment is possible when people have direct and consistent contact with those in government. The Anti-Federalist emphasis on *voluntary attachment* reflects the view that in a small republic, governance is a vehicle for social process. Implicit in this view is the idea that we must "know" those who are governing as we know our neighbors to whom we share a social commitment. As the political scientist Herbert Storing (1981) notes: "... the bonds of political union must be woven from the strands of natural association" (p. 41).

For the Anti-Federalists, any form of republic other than a small republic obviated the possibility for this type of relationship. They argued that the election of federal representatives would not be not enough to secure this attachment. Brutus (an Anti-Federalist pseudonym) wrote that members of a large republic "will have no confidence in their legislature, suspect them of ambitious views, be jealous of every measure they adopt, and will not support the laws they pass" (Storing, 1981, p.16). Further, the Anti-

federalists suggested that if government couldn't exist through human relationship then it would exist through the exercise of force. The Anti-Federalist Richard Henry Lee argued:

... opinion founded on the knowledge of those who govern, procures obedience without force. But remove the opinion, which must fall with a knowledge of characters in so widely extended a country, and force becomes necessary to secure the purposes of civil government. (Storing, p. 17)

During the founding period standing armies were feared as the instruments of coercive government. Herbert Storing suggests that in the present day, one can substitute a concern for standing armies with a concern for top down models of organization which reinforce message of government by distant control.

### *The Responsibility of Government*

A second argument that is central to the Anti-Federalist position is a concern for making government responsible to the people it serves. In our interviews with students we found that they also shared this concern. Not surprisingly, they expressed a great distrust in most politicians. More importantly however, were their views about government agencies. Their experience was-and this was especially true for students of color-that government agencies had no lasting interest in their communities. Rather, the relationship was impersonal, transitory, and didactic.

On this point, the Anti-Federalists argued that only a small republic would allow for its people to elicit genuine responsibility from their government. At the core of this argument is again the concept of human relationship. Responsibility from this perspective suggests the idea of being present and of forming mutually developed sets of expectations.

While it is clear that we do have accountable democratic government in our society, the concern of the Anti-Federalists seems present in 1998. Representatives and program administrators may have the public interest in mind but act primarily as men of reason (McSwite, 1997) who make decisions alone as opposed to engaging in collaborative decision-making with the those affected by their decisions. The Anti-Federalists wanted not just accountability but representation by people who were like them and who were connected to them through social bonds. This is why jury trials were seen as a critical component of governance by the Anti-Federalists. As a member of a jury, current hyper-reality aside, one is held responsible by a connection to one's peers. Hence, ensuring responsible government meant being in relationship with one another.

### *Maintaining Relationship*

"Government operates upon the spirit of the people, as well as the spirit of the people operates upon it. .." (Smith in Storing, 1981, p.19). This quote from Melancton Smith underscores the Anti-Federalist view that the polity must be a forum for dialogue and serve as the basis for human development. It was to have an educative function: "a school of citizenship as much as a scheme for government" (Storing, p. 21). It is this type of dialogue which allows people to be connected to one another and collaboratively decide how to decide what to do next. Our interviews suggest that the youngest cohort of MP A students see this kind of dialogue occurring in non-governmental forums but not in traditional government agencies.

Maintaining relationship requires us to think differently about the role of reason and the process of defining shared purposes. As McSwite suggest:

If we, in short, can agree on something that we want to do next and set about doing it, then we do not need to worry. Our subsequent actions will create the world. At bottom, it is authentic human

relationship that creates the world. *If we have relationship, we do not need reason. (emphasis in the original)* (1997, p. 261)

McSwite calls this perspective collaborative pragmatism and identify it as the heart of the suppressed constitutional sub theme of Anti-Federalism.

### **Additional Research: The Ford Foundation Partnership Project**

The theme of collaborative pragmatism is important for public administration because it reassures us that popular cynicism about big government might actually be a manifestation of a public ethos, grounded in the tenets of Anti-Federalism. In fact, a recent public opinion study of Generation X (18 to 34 year-olds) by Hart and Teeter (1997) for the Ford Foundation *Partnership for Trust in Government* project found that young adults do express public service ideals. Their ambivalence about government service notwithstanding, they identify teaching and social work occupations over lucrative careers in the private sector. These findings were surprising to the authors of the study:

Young people today, we often hear, are estranged from their government. This is ostensibly a generation in which government inspires cynicism rather than hope. The call to public service, it is said, does not stir the hearts of young adults as it did in an earlier time. If confronted with the challenge to "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country" many Americans would imagine Generation X replying collectively "Whatever." (1997, p. 1)

The study reported that young Americans were ambivalent about government employment not because of narrow self-interest but because they doubted whether a government job would allow them to serve the community and to help others. Respondents who said they preferred a public service career over the private sector were more likely to make helping their community priority in their lives. Moreover when the question in the 1997 survey about the priorities of young adults was compared to a similar question from a 1989 survey, there was a significant increase in the percent of all respondents rating "close knit family life" and "help the community." The study concluded that, "Young Americans have a personal thirst for public service that they do not collectively recognize in themselves" (Hart & Teeter, 1997, p.1).

Distrust of big government and large-scale organizations may signal a resurgence of "collaborative pragmatism" among Generation X, instead of the pervasive cynicism normally attributed to this age cohort. Specifically, young people already working in the public sector were more likely than their private sector counterparts to be concerned about government work being "too political." Those who had jobs in the private sector were more likely to perceive government as "too bureaucratic." This finding is significant for our purposes because philosophical pragmatism, as well as the Progressive Movement inspired by pragmatism, were a reaction against political corruption not against government per se. In fact, those respondents who were familiar with government's past successes were 50% more likely to express interest in government service work than those with little knowledge (Hart & Teeter, 1997, p.7).

Other major studies of Generation X and the public service are now underway. Public Administration faculty at the George Washington University are conducting a study at multiple sites around the country under contract with NASPAA and a grant from the Pew Trust. The combination of large-scale surveys and smaller focus group studies of Generation X will provide us with valuable insights into the motivations of young adults to enter public service. The findings of these various studies will also inform our design of the MPA and our programmatic mission statements.

Most importantly, however, the voices of young adults add strength to McSwite's argument that there was a "misfounding" of public administration on Federalist principles and that the crisis of legitimacy in the field could be resolved by recovering Anti-Federalist ideals buried in our collective psyche. The motivations of Generation X to enter the public service seem to be based on a pragmatic impulse to address concrete problems as experienced by members of their families and communities, rather than approach policy issues at the level of federal government. Complaints by MPA students about "too much (federal) government" in the content of their courses may be a symptom of the misfounding of our field on Federalist principles, rather than a sign that the newest generation of students are misguided in their choice of public administration as a field of study.

### **Our Study: Focus Groups at the University of Nebraska, Omaha**

We invited current MPA students at the University of Nebraska at Omaha to join in focus group discussions designed to elicit information about their motivations for enrolling in our graduate program. Although our primary interest were the "X'ers," i.e., those between the ages of 22 and 35 years of age, our focus groups included students who up to the age of 55 years for purposes of comparison. Focus group sessions were organized by age of the participants and lasted for 90 minutes each. We posed a series of questions about participants' social experiences and their decision to enter the public service (See Appendix). We employed a funnel arrangement in the design of our questions, beginning with a broad open-ended question, moving to a middle range that emphasized the central topic and concluding with a final general question (Krueger 1998).

#### *The Responses*

The voices of our youngest cohort of students echo the themes of Anti-Federalism as discussed earlier in this paper. These themes are: (1) voluntary attachment to government, (2) the responsibility of government, and (3) maintaining relationships. The section below provides a fuller account of the student's views on these themes. Our emphasis here is on the responses from the youngest cohort. It is their perspective that we feel will shape the future direction of public administration.

**Voluntary Attachment to Government.** Individuals will have a *voluntary attachment* to government if they are well acquainted with those who are governing. The Anti-Federalists argued that this type of relationship occurs in the context of a small republic. The youngest cohort of the MPA students we interviewed, reflected this same view in their discussion of community. The following excerpt of the Focus Group #1 is relevant.

#### *Facilitator #1:*

*Before we move on, I wanted to ask you each if you would say what the word community means to you.*

#### *Participant # 1:*

*Community to me is related to the institutions with which you work. If I am a hospital administrator, my community would be the hospital I work at but the hospital offers services to the public. In my case a rural population. I am in a town of 9000, but would probably serve four or five smaller surrounding communities. To me it is a proximity issue.*

#### *Participant #2:*

*Community to me is along the same lines of what (participant#1) was saying. I grew up in a small town where four or five towns joined together for services. Several groups in the same area working together to provide services, educational facilities etc.*

*Participant #3:*

*Community to me refers to the neighborhood. It includes everybody: the babies all the way to the older people and those working or not working; community it doesn't necessarily have to be in relation to services. You could be a community and have nothing but just the people there. You don't have to have formal organization.*

*Participant #4:*

*A community to me is a groups of people working together for some common purpose.*

*Participant #5:*

*I think a community is whatever relationship you have with people. In a generic sense, we as public administration students are a community because we are working together to try and get this degree and get out of here. But you also have other relationships with people you work with, your family, as well as other communities. And, for those who like to shop, when you go to the same store all the time, that's a community because they know you. There are a lot of different communities: the relationships and networks that you have.*

*Participant #6:*

*A community to me is a group of people who have something in common. For example the aviation community includes everyone who is involved in the aviation industry: transport, cargo, and general aviation. A community is a group of people who all have something in common or working for a similar goal.*

*Participant #7:*

*I agree. I feel that there are different communities and you can be a part of several of them. Work and/or neighborhood; whatever you have ties to.*

*Participant #8:*

*I would agree that it is a group of people. The difference I would say is that communities don't always work together. Sometimes there are factions that split it apart. That is one of the challenges for public administration. (Participant#1) pointed out that there are different levels. Sometimes those networks or policy communities work together, but in cities that is not necessarily the case.*

*Facilitator #2:*

*It occurred to me in everything that people have said so far, being a public administrator today means that you have to focus on more than a single program. So it really makes your job more difficult because you don't have one program with one set of rules and regulations ... You really have to be thinking more creatively about how to pull your clients into the decision-making process or how to conceptualize who it is you are serving. Speaking as someone from a different generation, that is a real difference as compared to how I thought of public administration back in the 60's.*

*The responsibility of government. As mentioned before, a second argument of the Anti-Federalist position is that government is responsible to the people it serves. This theme was powerfully expressed by the younger cohort of MP A students.*

*Participant #5*

*My personal experience was working in the community and seeing people that needed a voice. They needed a voice that came from them. Someone who didn't mind going where they lived. Someone who could say what they needed. I think public administration requires a relationship with people. Not just some huge voice saying: "You need to do this! You need to do that!" But, someone who is actually working with the people, is in relationship with them and knows them by name. Someone who can say: "I met with community A and this is what they really want. "And, they know me by name, not just some huge figure that comes by when it is election time or comes by when they need something but someone who is just there to be there.*

*This concern for consistent contact reflects a need to be heard. The Anti-Federalists argued that in a large government, relationship could not be established and as a result citizens would be unable to make government responsible to them. We find our students making a similar argument. They make the case that "big government is not accountable." Hence what we have concluded is that they are not cynical about public service.*

*Rather they are skeptical of the ability of top down government to make a difference in their lives and in the lives of those they hope to serve. Heard in the context of the entire 90 minute conversation, statements about the large government focus of the MPA curriculum revealed not a lack of interest in public administration, but a different way of thinking about it.*

*Participant #3:*

*I don't really know completely, in fact when I first took my first class I really didn't know what it was. Just knew I wanted to be in grad school. It really shocked me how much public administration was about government. I went, my goodness, did I pick the wrong major? You know I'm not really into all this government stuff. But that shocked me how much government is involved in community affairs. I thought it would be more, community than government*

*Facilitator #2:*

*Well, was there a person or experience in your life that helped you get to that point where your image of public administration was more community-based rather than more government-based. ?*

*Participant #3:*

*I don't think so, I still don't know that I know exactly what it is.*

*Participant #1:*

*I am in total agreement with what you said. I was shocked too when I realized how large of the spectrum public administration is. Because I think the person that probably influenced me was my mom. She worked for United Way. To me that was public service. I am from a small town and I thought, OK, that's the kind of stuff I'll be doing. And then I was shocked: "Oh my lord, this is government" (nodding and agreement from others).*

*Participant #2:*

*You see, I'm opposite of all you guys, because I always had this government image and it was amazing how in one of my first classes last semester, someone said to the professor: "This relates a lot to government and political science. I've never had a political science course before. " I was like: Are these*



*people crazy? Do they not realize that this has to do with government? (laughter) I was totally awe struck that there were people in the class who had never had a government course.*

*Many others:*

*I'm one of them.*

*Participant#3:*

*I steered so away from political science. I don't like it.*

*Participant #8:*

*I changed my major from political science to public administration after the first semester. The two were housed in the he same department. A lot of the teachers were the same. In order to major in political science, you had to take three or four classes in public administration. It wasn 't until I got here and saw all the nonprofit stuff that I started to look at it from your point of view.*

*Participant #5:*

*I agree too. When I first took Introduction to Public Administration, I thought, man I must be in the wrong place because everything was just government. I was thinking about public service. I was thinking wow, what about the local people what about the regular old local stuff? Everything was just so large, so government wide. Everything is based on: how government does this or that." The big government." I'm thinking, what about the little people's government? What about the regular old average government?*

*Then, when I had the non-profit management courses, it really put things into perspective. But, I found out that I wasn't actually supposed to take that course because it wasn't in my concentration. But If I hadn't had that course I would still have this image of public administration as this huge government thing without really seeing the local stuff that goes along with it.*

*Facilitator #2:*

*I'm smiling because what's coming into my head right now is: Well, consider who is teaching you. For example, coming out of the 60's, big government was thought of as something that would serve the public interest. So, I think a lot has happened and one of the reasons we are interested in what you think is that we want to be sure that we're in touch with what is actually best for the public interest. I mean maybe it doesn't mean big government anymore and that is one of things that is interesting about hearing .. .*

**Maintaining Relationship.** We think it is important to emphasize that we see a resurgent interest and commitment to public service in the younger MPA students. As mentioned above, it is not cynicism but an alternative view of governance. The Anti-Federalists saw the polity as having an educative function. It was education that would foster the virtue required for commitment to a small republic. Similarly we find that students have such a commitment: a commitment to change and to relationship. This quote from one of the participants sums it up well:

*Participant # 1:*

*What I see generally, there is obviously some spark in each of us that leaning toward the public sector instead of the private. We don't want to be big time CEO's of some company overpowering people. We want to be on the people level and work for them instead of above them. I think that that is a probably the general consensus. I hope.*

### *Discussion: The Youngest Cohort*

A reinvigorated progressive ethos ran throughout the animated conversation of the younger cohort, echoing McSwite's thesis about the need to legitimate our field in the pragmatist sentiment of the early twentieth century, as well as the Anti-Federalist distrust of large-scale political and economic institutions (1997). The communities of the younger cohort included small not-for-profits, neighborhood organizations and churches, and their public service to these communities involved direct contact with members. In fact our students of color spoke passionately about the need for social justice regardless of age group in a way reminiscent of the progressive period. Indeed, just as the turbulence and disorientation of the late nineteenth century seemed to call for a major conceptual refurbishing (McSwite, 1997, p.130), so the social and economic conditions of the post-modern period seem to call for practical social action.

### *Late Boomers: Caught in Transition*

In our focus groups with students ages 36 to 42, we heard a different message. They seemed to be directly affected by the organizational shifts occurring in both the public and private sector. Many are working in large scale organizations which are in transition. As a result, they are trying to make sense of what is happening directly to them. Their responses centered around strategies of adaptation, leaving little opportunity for a direct challenge to the changes affecting them. Concerns for family and livelihood were pitted against concerns for protecting a public service ethos that seems to be eroding within the organizations with which they are affiliated. The following exchange from that focus group is representative of their larger discussion.

#### *Participant # 1:*

*What you said, about the health care component was important. What I liked is that it would help me but that it wasn't just health. And with the way health care is, uncertainty about the future and the job market, I felt that this would give me a broader background to be able to do other things. I didn't want to go back and work on the floor. Also, if something happened then I would be able to shift.*

#### *Participant #2 :*

*Marketability ...*

#### *Participant #3:*

*That became my motivation once I go into it ....*

#### *Facilitator #2:*

*So the institution you worked for really pushes for you to further your education?*

#### *Participant #2:*

*I know my organization is doing so as well due to credibility and certification issue. One of the decisions I made was that I didn't want a degree that was purchased and there were several options to do that ... I didn't want to be hemmed in... And with the MPA I have lots of options ....*

#### *Facilitator #2:*

*It occurred to me as you were talking that your sense of what the future holds for you professionally is a lot more uncertain than when I went into the field. I wonder how much of that is the sense that what the*

*public sector is seems to be changing on you so that you want to keep your options open, particularly in the health field. Issues such as: where the locus of the service delivery will be and who is going to be responsible for what are a lot less "pinned down" than when I was first going into government service. So, I'm really picking up a lot of that in what you are saying.*

*Participant #1:*

*I think that is very true. And that is one of the reasons I had so much support at home to do this because if anything would happen at home, then I would still have the ability to put the kids through school. And keep a certain standard of lifestyle and those types of things ... to keep up with whatever could happen. I feel that I have to keep learning just to hold my own ...*

*Facilitator #2:*

*So the world is changing really fast?*

*All:*

*Yes!*

*Deep Skepticism : The Oldest Cohort*

*Ironically, it was the older cohorts-those with a more traditional commitment to large-scale government-who were the most skeptical about the future of the public service. They had lived through the downward trajectory of assassination, war and scandal during the 1960s, 70s and 80s, but continued to define public administration as large, primarily federal, government. The following discussion from their focus group makes this point well.*

*Facilitator #1:*

*The dynamic of those public events is that they have some affect on the psyche of the nation, or how we feel as a national community. That then seems to link back to our notion of why we are in public service. It seems to be the idea that one feels connected to others in the national community based on experiencing those events. This in turn has an impact on one's public service identity.*

*Participant #1:*

*I would like to go back to the Oklahoma City bombing, that was one of the things that affected me as a public servant. Now, if you go into any public or Federal building, it is highly secure ... It seems as though the workers there are living in fear. I mean you may not see that they are but, they don't know when someone is coming in ... I think that tragedy affected most people who work in public organizations. Even in my building you can't visit the building between 12 and 1pm because the guard is not there. As a public agency you should be open at all times. It is fear that someone is going to come in and bomb the place that has affected me.*

*Facilitator #2:*

*In Washington, for a number of years they've had security checkpoints where you have to have clearance to go up above the r floor. So, you don't have a sense that these buildings are open to the public anymore. Other than the national park buildings ...*

*Participant# 1:*

*My husband is a Federal employee. He has to wear his ID card around his neck at all times . . .*

Facilitator #2:

*I don't know about you, but it gives me a feeling of ... If I start back in the 60's when people actually thought that the government was going to do something good for them . . and then to feel.... I mean the fear I think is associated with the sense that there are people out there who absolutely hate the government so much that they would want to blow it up as a statement. I don't remember that much hostility toward government when I first went into the public service back in the 60's.*

Participant #2:

*I think it started in the late 60's, early 70's with Vietnam and the protesting .. Do you think that is where the catalyst was for the people hating the government like they do today?*

Facilitator #1:

*Someone in an earlier session mentioned people feeling isolated. Their view was that people are so hostile to government because, to some degree, people feel disconnected from one another and as a result, their response is not to build community. Instead they have a bunker mentality against any intrusion into their personal lives ...*

Participant #3:

*I think I attribute a lot of what you were saying to the late 70's and early 80's to the farm failures and the related bankruptcies. The banks, backed up by the government foreclosed on these farms and forced farmers to sell out and leave their property. A lot of them were farms that had been in families for years and years ... Most of these militia groups that are against government have some connection to the farm. I was wondering if that might account for some of the resentment toward government ...*

Facilitator #2:

*In my own reading there were two waves of anti-government sentiment. One coming out of the late 60's with the reaction to the Vietnam war and to racism. Another wave of anti-government sentiment, I link with the early 80's and the Sagebrush Rebellion. There was a move by the Reagan and Bush administrations to sell off public lands in response largely to pressure from western state; who wanted to have more private ownership and so forth. There was also opposition to the environmental movement and to environmental regulations. I see that as anti-government but as reacting against a different problem as they perceived it as government regulating too much of our social lives, perhaps. So, the antigovernment feeling has been around a long time although I see it coming from different ends of the political spectrum. Sometimes the themes overlap, but I see them as being motivated by different concerns.*

Participant #4:

*I guess I agree with what folks are saying in terms of how the War, the Arab oil embargo, and the "me first" individualism of the 80's are things that tend to make one cynical about government. I was sitting here trying to reconcile my skepticism of the government as the faceless entity with my satisfaction about what I am learning in the MPA program. I thought, what is the sense of loss that I feel as result of the War and the embargo? I think one of my greatest regrets in observing society is the loss of a sense of community and civility.*

## Questions for Further Study

The initial findings of our study were surprising, considering the hostile indifference to ideology found in previous studies of Generation X (Marshall, 1997; Sacks, 1996). We saw little evidence of a "patchwork self" (Elkind, 1984) or a decentering of identity. Although they were obviously affected by the pace of change and the technological complexity of society, their response was to engage in practical action on behalf of social justice rather than succumb to cynicism and the blank stare (Sacks, 1996.) These results are very encouraging, for they suggest that young people entering the public service have the potential to help legitimate our field.

It is important to emphasize that the Anti-Federalist perspective identified by McSwite (1997) is more than an historical curiosity. A new generation of young adults are entering the study and practice of public administration with ideas very similar to the Anti-Federalists and turn-of-the-century pragmatists. They have already expressed very definite views about what the MPA curriculum ought to contain rejecting the traditional emphasis on federal governmental bureaucracy, regulatory policy instruments and administrative law. Instead they have identified courses in state and local government, nonprofit management and skills training in negotiation and collaboration. The voices of this new generation of public administrators echo McSwite's argument that our legitimacy crisis as a field originates in our neglect of the Anti-Federalist and pragmatic traditions. Their ideas may well shape the future curricula of our academic programs.

Recent trends suggest that we are already experiencing a resurgence of "collaborative pragmatism" (McSwite, 1997) in the practice of public administration. The Environmental Protection Agency, for example, has embarked on "a new generation of environmental protection" which it calls Community-Based Environmental Protection (EPA, 1996). Its emphasis on forming partnerships with local government, public interest groups, industry, academic institutions, private landowners and others signals a change from monitoring compliance with nation-wide standards to facilitating geographically focused, comprehensive plans to assess and improve environmental quality. The link to "collaborative pragmatism"-and ultimately to "Anti-Federalism"- are evident in the shift of EPA's role from regulator to active partner in community-based coalitions and the devolution of decision-making authority to the local level; in statements by EPA declaring respect for local understanding of ecological systems; and in its commitment to a process of experimentation.

Several years ago, DeWitt John anticipated institutional change at the EPA in his book, *Civic Environmentalism* (1994). His research on community-based initiatives to address new environmental problems showed that the traditional federal regulatory role as "the guerilla in the closet" had largely failed to protect local economies from ecological threats such as non-point source pollution of water supplies by widespread use of agricultural fertilizers . As John described it, "Civic environmentalism is a more collaborative, integrative approach to environmental policy than traditional regulation" (p .10). New policy tools are needed to solve pollution problems caused by hundreds of farmers or, in the case of auto emissions, millions of drivers. The tools suggested by John "education, technical assistance and economic incentives" position the Federal government in a role closer to the Anti-Federalists than the Federalists. Environmental policy is only one arena, however, where it has become obvious that the dynamics of a post-industrial economy call for new (or perhaps old) approaches to governance.

Much of the discussion in this paper has centered around the concept of relationship, particularly as it relates to the perspective of the Anti-Federalists. In addition, we have argued that the discussion of our younger students has implications for the practice of public administration particularly the in terms of alternative models of organization.

There is a substantial body of literature that provides an intellectual argument for themes we've presented. This literature includes philosophy and legal theory as well public administration (Rorty, 1991; Taylor, 1992; Wood, 1992; McSwite, 1997; Gardbaurn, 1992). Three important claims are made in this literature. First, our ontological status as human beings, i.e. atomism vs. anti-atomism, has much to do with how we conceive ourselves and our role in society. Second, our identity as human beings is inextricably connected to our role as "citizens and as participants in a common life." (Gardbaum, 1992, p. 691). Third, who we are as a society and who we are as public administrators has all to do with the discourse and therefore the relationship that we construct.

While all three of these points are important, we see our paper making a contribution to the third idea mentioned. The most poignant comments our youngest students were around the quality of the relationship between government and its citizens.

We seek an approach to public life at the end of the 20th century that will enable us to address the concerns of the next generation, especially those interested in public service.

## **Appendix**

### *Introductory Question:*

Tell us who you are, where you are in the MPA program, and what you most enjoy doing when you are not in the classroom.

### *Middle Range Questions:*

Tell us what the word "public" in public administration means to you.

Generally one's views are informed by a person they've met or by an experience they've had. What persons or experiences in your life have helped shaped your views about public administration?

Now, let's get away from the abstract and have some fun. Close your eyes and picture yourself in front of the TV. What face of a public figure appears on the screen? How are you reacting to it?

Do the same thing, but now think of a public event. How do you react to it?

### *Concluding Question:*

In the next phase of our study we will be doing in-depth individual interviews to further probe these issues. Is there anything you suggest we include?

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