SHORT-CIRCUITING THE BUREAUCRACY IN THE GREAT SOCIETY POLICY ORIGINS IN EDUCATION*

by

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In the 1960s the scholarly literature in political science and public administration on the American Presidency and legislative policy formulation reflected a surge of interest in the secret task forces created by Lyndon Johnson to develop programs for the Great Society. Although this fascination with the task forces was initiated by a historian—in the spring of 1966 William E. Leuchtenburg traced the policy planning origin of the Great Society programs to the task forces in a Reporter article—the subsequent burst of scholarly analysis was produced by social scientists, whose methods typically centered on the twin pillars of ready access to congressional hearings, votes, and legislation on the one hand, and on the other, anonymous interviews with officials in the executive branch.

Leuchtenburg's Reporter article primarily described the evolution of the Johnson task forces of 1964 that had led to the legislative breakthroughs of the 89th Congress in 1965. But he also alluded to the procedural innovation of the task force device, which was consciously designed to circumvent the standard process of legislative agenda formulation. This was the central clearance method, whereby legislative proposals bubbled up from the old-line departments and agencies and were sorted out by the Budget Bureau and the White House staff. The primary complaint against this process was that it stifled initiative and strangled innovation; agency agendas tended to be repetitive, to ask for what was denied the previous time around, and to reflect the rather predictable shopping lists of the powerful clientele groups. At the gut level of power brokerage, the central question was how could the President, with roughly a thousand short term political appointees, seize control of the permanent sub-government of two million entrenched civil servants with their constituency and congressional subcommittee allies.

Political scientists and students of public administration subsequently fastened upon the task force innovation, in a brief burst of scholarship that was published during the Nixon presidency. Most of the case studies centered on John Gardner's education task force of 1964, for as Leuchtenburg had observed, "The history of the elementary-education bill is probably the best example of the success of the task-force technique." I have commented at length on this literature elsewhere, and I will only summarize my assessment here. The strength of this body of social science scholarship is that these helpful books—by such respected social analysts as Stephen Bailey, Edith Mosher, Eugene Eidenberg, Roy Morey, Norman Thomas—were prompt and contemporary assessments, researched and written by scholar-practitioners who enjoyed privileged access to policy actors whose memories were fresh. These studies were largely external analyses of congressional, agency, and constituent group behavior. Their case study methods combined legislative hearings of agency and interest group testimony with customarily anonymous interviews, which

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sought to maximize candor by masking sources. Their weaknesses, then, mirrored their strengths, in that such contemporary portraits inescapably lacked the perspective that only time could bring, their anonymous interviews blocked the evidential specificity that historians demand, and the somewhat episodic quality of their cases studies encouraged discontinuity of process and a short-ranged view of policy evolution.

Archival history by definition enjoys the advantages of enhanced perspective and documentary specificity, and if pursued diligently it provides the continuity of policy flow. It concomitantly suffers some disadvantages, such as faded or dead memories, missing or missed documents, and blocked access. Neither mode of analysis is inherently superior to the other; both are needed—but historians must (or should) wait for the archives to open. Now that the archives are mostly open and the oral histories are mostly available, and the perspective of the 1980s provides an ironic circularity, as the Reagan administration seeks to dismantle much of the superstructure of the Great Society, what do the historian’s documents and perspective tell him about the impact and meaning of the Great Society task-forcing, particularly in the case-study area of federal education policy?

II

In a general sense the task force device is but a modern extension of the ancient practice wherein the sovereign appointed ad hoc groups to ponder weighty policy matters and recommend alternative policy choices, as with the British Royal Commission. But as a systematic device for formulating legislative agendas, its modern American manifestation originated in the presidential campaign and pre-inaugural planning of John F. Kennedy, and a comparison of the original Kennedy and Johnson task force operations is revealing. Immediately after winning the Democratic presidential nomination in July of 1960, Kennedy appointed a series of high-visibility advisory committees led by such Democratic luminaries as Stevenson, Symington, Harriman, and the like, but the real task forces designed for the New Frontier’s program formulation were formed immediately following the election, with Theodore Sorensen and Myer Feldman in charge. But since these 29 unannounced groups were to report in January, the crucial formative work on the new administration’s legislative agenda was dominated by the Budget Bureau, which had produced a massive “Kennedypedia” of program promises and possibilities (a parallel “Nixonpedia” was shelved). The Bureau’s director-designate David Bell, together with BOB Veterans Elmer Staats and Phillip Hughes, worked closely and smoothly with Sorensen and Feldman, and many fundamental decisions of program priority and structure were made in pre-Christmas sessions between senior aides and the President-elect at Kennedy’s Palm Beach retreat. The task force reports would have to be “fitted in” later.

Then in early January the major task force chairmen reported to the Kennedy suite in New York’s Carlyle Hotel to deliver their recommendations, and the education or Hovde report (after its task force chairman, Purdue President Frederick Hovde) illustrates the dangers of this process. Hovde boldly called for a $9.4 billion, four-year program of federal aid in which $5.8 billion in general aid would go to public schools only. The conservative press, Republican spokesmen, the Catholic hierarchy, and southern segregationists howled in protest, and the extreme frustration of the Kennedy administration in passing significant education legislation during the next three congressional sessions constitutes the chief domestic failure of the New Frontier. In all of this, Vice President Lyndon Johnson, who otherwise had little to do, was watching carefully.

When Lyndon Johnson first addressed the Congress as President five days after Kennedy’s assassination in November of 1963, he hammered away at the themes of national unity and continuity with Kennedy’s legislative program, and the decision to concentrate on a tax cut, a civil rights bill, and a war on poverty was made before 1964 arrived. This placed the di-
visive education issue on a back burner, and there it largely remained as a legislative priority, while the first wave of Johnson task forces worked in closely guarded secrecy to forge a distinctively Johnsonian legislative program for 1965.

Early proponents of the task force device within the new Johnson administration were Budget Director Kermit Gordon and Chairman Walter Heller of the Council of Economic Advisers, together with presidential advisors Bill Moyers and Richard Goodwin. In his “Great Society” speech at the University of Michigan commencement on May 22, Johnson announced:

We are going to assemble the best thought and the broadest knowledge from all over the world . . . a series of White House conferences and meetings—on the cities, on natural beauty, on the quality of education and on other emerging challenges. And from these meetings and from these studies, we will begin to set our course toward the Great Society.

On May 30, Gordon and Heller sent Moyers a joint memo proposing 14 task forces, and the first three echoed the Ann Arbor speech: (1) Metropolitan Problems, (2) Education, (3) Preservation of Natural Beauty. Gordon and Heller also suggested that “the Task Forces be composed mainly of technical experts who possess the gift of originality and imagination . . . the first systematic assault on these problems should be made quietly by people with specialized training and skills.” They further urged that the task forces be kept quite small, and that their final reports should be submitted immediately after the presidential election. On July 2 the President announced the task force operation to his Cabinet, correctly anticipating an extraordinary political and economic opportunity in 1965, which called for the Johnson administration “to think in bold terms and to strike out in new directions.” President Johnson emphasized that the task forces “will operate without publicity. It is very important that this not become a public operation.” On July 6, Moyers sent out his marching orders and the original 14 task forces (see List A) were launched toward their November 10 deadline.

III

The Johnson task forces have been especially interesting to academics, partly because professors were so heavily represented on them. On the 13 original task forces for 1964 (excluding the civil rights task force, which was dropped after the passage of the Civil Rights Act on July 2) sat 124 distinguished citizens (I am excluding the 13 White House liaisons and the 13 executive secretaries from the executive branch, although their roles were crucial). Forty-six of these 124 were professors, exactly half of them from the Ivy League-plus-MIT (with Harvard predominating, not surprisingly), and a West Coast bloc of 10 represented the University of California campuses-plus-Stanford. Federal officials constituted the second largest bloc with 33 representatives, followed by municipal (8) and state (5) officials, commission-association-foundation executives (10), and representatives from corporations and law firms (9), think tanks (6), and miscellaneous (7). Only five members were women, even fewer were black, and there was no representation, oddly, from organized labor.

The Gardner task force on education was in most respects typical (see List B). Its blue-ribbon representation included all levels of education, public and private, secular and Catholic, black as well as white. The debate over its contribution to the ESEA and the Higher Education Act of 1965 has been contentious, and is symbolized by two doctoral dissertations, both out of the University of Chicago, that have reached opposite conclusions. In 1967 education doctoral candidate Philip Kearney, using the customary congressional data-plus-interview research method, minimized the impact of the Gardner task force. But a decade later political scientist Robert Hawkinson reconstructed the evolution of ESEA from the Johnson Library archives. Hawkinson, whose dissertation is far more persuasive than Kearney’s, distributes the credit between bureaucratic entrepreneurs
List A
From the Files of Bill Moyers, LBJ Library
1965 Legislative Program Task Forces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Force</th>
<th>White House Liaison</th>
<th>Executive Secretary</th>
<th>Chairman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>Feldman and Cater White</td>
<td>Gordon Murray, BOB (A.J. Read, BOB, alternate)</td>
<td>George Hilton, University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fenton Shepard, BOB (Robert Teeters, BOB, alternate)</td>
<td>California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Resources</td>
<td>Goodwin</td>
<td>William Cannon, BOB (Emerson Elliott, BOB, alternate)</td>
<td>John W. Gardner, President Carnegie Corp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Staats</td>
<td>Alex Greene, BOB (Walter Smith, BOB, alternate until 9/1; Jim Falcon, BOB, after 9/1)</td>
<td>George James Commissioner of Health, NYC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Goodwin</td>
<td>William Ross, BOB (Phil Hanna, BOB, alternate)</td>
<td>Joseph A Pechman, Brookings Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Goodwin</td>
<td>George Lamb, BOB (Donald Lindholm, BOB, alternate)</td>
<td>Frederick J. Lawton, Former Budget Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan and Urban Problems Preservation of Natural Beauty Intergovernmental Fiscal Cooperation</td>
<td>Heller</td>
<td>Anita Wells, Treasury</td>
<td>Don Price Harvard University Paul Samuelson MIT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost Reduction*</td>
<td>Roger Jones</td>
<td>Ray Kitchell, BOB (Gordon Osborn, BOB, alternate)</td>
<td>Charles Murphy, Department of Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Reorganization*</td>
<td>Harold Seidman</td>
<td>Herb Jasper, BOB</td>
<td>Karl Kaysen Harvard University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustaining Prosperity**</td>
<td>Ackley</td>
<td>Locke Anderson and Susan Lepper, CEA</td>
<td>John Corson Princeton University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Feldman and White Seidman</td>
<td>Don Horton, BOB (Richard Ottman, BOB, alternate) (Justice to provide)</td>
<td>John Corson Princeton University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Rights</td>
<td>Bator</td>
<td>Ed Hamilton, BOB (task force member Dick Richardson, BOB, will act as alternate if necessary)</td>
<td>John Corson Princeton University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Economic Policy</td>
<td></td>
<td>Michael March, BOB (Milton Turen, BOB, alternate)</td>
<td>John Corson Princeton University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income Maintenance</td>
<td>Schultze</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Originally Task Force on Efficiency and Economy.
** Originally Task Force on Antirecession policy.

and outside experts, assigning Wilbur Cohen major credit for developing the distribution formula for the billion-dollar Title I—together with Senator Wayne Morse and his committee staff, especially Charles Lee.

Keppel receives primary credit for Title II's $300 million program of textbook and library grants to public and private school children—Keppel's crucial "sweetener" to the Catholics—together with Catholic Congressman Hugh Carey of New York. But primary credit for the ESEA's last three titles goes to Gardner and his task force, especially Title III's supplementary education centers, but also Title IV's educational research laboratories, and Title V's aid to strengthen state departments of education (also a Keppel favorite). The Gardner Report began with a plea for concentrating on equal educational opportunity, especially for the disadvantaged, and called for Great Society educational programs in the spirit of the war on poverty—which became the prime rationale for Title I. Add to this the aid to developing colleges program in the Higher Education Act, and the Gardner task force merits high marks for policy innovation. Also to be acknowledged are the task

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John W. Gardner
President, Carnegie Corporation
New York City

Executive Secretary
William B. Cannon
Bureau of the Budget
(Alternate: Emerson J. Elliott)

Members
James E. Allen, Jr.
Commissioner of Education
Albany, New York

Hedley W. Donovan
Editor, Time Magazine
New York City

Harold B. Gores
President, Educational Facilities Laboratory
New York City

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Polaroid Corporation
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Stanford, California

Stephen J. Wright
President
Fisk University

Jerrold R. Zacharias
Professor
Department of Physics
MIT

Francis Keppel
Commissioner of Education
Department of Health, Education and Welfare

Richard Goodwin
White House Liaison

force's persuasive powers behind the scenes, with Keppel ably negotiating with "the monsignors," with key figures on the Hill, and with senior officials in HEW and USOE in his dual role as both task force insider and Commissioner of Education, and with Gardner slated to chair the White House Conference on Education in July of 1965 and to replace Anthony Celebrezze in July as Secretary of HEW. Finally, outside task forces were excellent talent search and recruiting devices—witness Keppel's recruitment from the Hovde task force, and from Gardner's group, first came Gardner himself, then subsequently both James E. Allen and Sidney P. Marland as future commissioners of education.

But assessing the relative contributions of task forcing in 1964–65 is complicated by a unique set of external circumstances, most of which are consensually identified in the literature, even if their relative weight is not. First, and most obvious, is the Democratic landslide in 1964, which added 38 new Democratic seats in the
House and two in the Senate, and effectively broke the Kennedy stalemate. Second, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had at least temporarily defused the race or school desegregation issue. Third, the bitterness of the church-state dispute had been considerably reduced by the Johnson administration's adroit combination of negotiation that offered Catholics limited gains under the Everson formula of aid-to-the-child, not the school, and that overall appeared more attractive to combatant groups on both sides that continued mutual veto and recrimination. Fourth, in addition to this potential political, racial, and religious accommodation, there was former school-teacher Lyndon B. Johnson's passionate faith, which was at once naive and touching, in the pana-cean powers of education as the best passport out of poverty. Given this magic constellation of stars in fleeting alignment, Camelot came not with John F. Kennedy, but with Lyndon Johnson—for one brief shining moment in the middle 1960s. And Johnson knew it. Keppel recalls a legendary meeting in the Fish Room of the White House that fateful January:

President Johnson came in, looking cheerful as can be, and said to the half-dozen or so people in the room who were responsible for various pieces of legislation, “Look, we’ve got to do this in a hurry. We’ve got in with this majority (of sixteen million votes) in the Congress,” he said. “It doesn’t make any difference what we do. We’re going to lose them at the rate of about a million a month, and under those circumstances, get your subcommittee hearings going. Keppel, when are you starting yours?” And Cohen, who was handling the medical thing, “When are you starting yours?” “Get them through the sub-committee and through the full committee and past the rules committee and on to the floor of the House just as fast as you can get them going.” And then he turned around with that characteristic gesture and said, “I want to see a whole bunch of coonskins on the wall!”

IV

The standard literature so fully explicates these political, racial, religious, and personal factors, that one may safely take judicial notice of them. But wait. At the risk of appearing archly Victorian, with lots of sixties and seventies, I will argue that the archival evidence and the broader secondary analysis provided by a generation of historical perspective call for new attention to three additional and little appreciated circumstances surrounding the breakthrough events of 1964–65, that powerfully shaped their consequences. One is the strategic position of the Budget Bureau, together with its distinctively cynical attitude toward many of the line agencies, especially those regarded as captive of their clientele groups—like Labor, Commerce, and Agriculture—and most especially of all toward HEW and USOE. In developing educational policy, the Bureau's strategic position was individually occupied by William B. Cannon, who was Chief of the Education, Manpower, and Sciences Division, and who was executive secretary for the Gardner task force for 1964 and the Friday task force of 1966, and who sat on Keppel's interagency task force in 1965. In his capacity as staff director for the two major outside task forces on education, Cannon and hence the Bureau enjoyed a substantial measure of initiative and control over the agenda and information flow of the part-time task force, which typically met twice a month for five or six months, and Cannon did much of the early reporting drafting.

This process of policy evolution was so complex and the documentation is so extensive that only a sample of its texture and flavor may be attempted here. Much of the agenda of the Gardner task force was shaped as early as June 1964 (the task force was not formed until July) by an “Issue Paper” for education. Prepared by the Budget Bureau, the issue paper candidly indicated the past tendency for education proposals to reflect the shopping list of the educational establishment rather than the needs of learners, and it
called for a bold, new legislative program on a major scale “that will find appeal for the same reasons as the poverty program—because it recognizes the value of developing human resources as a step to advancement of social welfare and economic growth, and because it meets the needs of people (rather than of institutions or other levels of government).”\(^27\)

The policy continuities from the June issue paper to the Gardner Report’s 18 recommendations and ultimately to ESEA’s five titles are striking. Clearly the task force device was useful and timely as a catalyst in assisting the planners and rationalizers in the Budget Bureau, and the Great Society architects in the White House, creating greater freedom of maneuver from the tired continuities of line agency demands and central clearance procedures.\(^28\) In communicating with the Budget Bureau’s Director about program formulation, Cannon was often caustic about the hoary legislative submissions of HEW and USOE. On the Gardner task force, Cannon pushed the supplementary educational centers and the educational research and development laboratories (that became Titles III and IV of ESEA), in large part because they were new and hence not hostage to the educational establishment, and his confidence in the capacity of the Office of Education was so dismal that he argued for bypassing OE altogether and creating a new office in the Executive Office of the President to develop national educational policy and run the new programs, as a sort of educational OEO.\(^29\) The Gardner Report ultimately included such a recommendation, together with a more predictable alternative of creating a cabinet-level Department of Education to pull together education programs spread throughout 15 departments and agencies.

When in early December of 1964, OE sent up to the Budget Bureau its package of legislative proposals in response to the Gardner Report, Cannon expressed his general disgust in a Bureau staff memorandum: “There seems to be a serious possibility that the Office of Education’s legislative program will end up as an un-sorted grab bag of items with priority given to the most ineffective, second order, or trivial.”\(^30\) OE’s first five priorities were impacted aid, free textbooks, aid to state departments of education, university extension, and student loans—“Everything else is a distant second—the supplementary education centers; the national educational laboratories; the college development programs, etc.,—and are probably thought of as a cover, to be peeled off, as the program moves through the Executive Branch and Congress.” He complained that the OE approach had no substantive connection among the OE items, no rationale, no theory about education.”

In fact, they probably were not selected with any regard toward the substantive problems of education. Their real connection is that most of them have the support of powerful groups; the NEA, the State School Superintendents, the Land Grant Colleges, and the American Council on Education—the silent partners in the administration of the Office of Education.

Cannon regarded the impacted areas approach as only “a vehicle and strategem for obtaining general aid, particularly for teachers’ salaries,” and as such it “suffers from the smell of deception, blackmail, and cynicism,” and would represent “the first move to exploit the poor for purposes that have very little to do with them.” Furthermore, the OE proposal to provide “free textbooks for all schools is a straightforward attempt to buy parochial school aid for the impacted areas program.” Aid to state departments of education was “a long-range and questionable program in its best light, and a ‘patronage’ program for OC at its worst.” Cannon concluded gloomily that the existing situation seems pretty hopeless. The Office of Education has again confirmed the long-standing, widespread view that it is an incompetent stodgy agency with no program except that furnished by outside bureaucracies.”

Cannon’s indictment was so extreme that it was a bit unfair, especially in
light of the subsequent contributions of Keppel, Cohen, and Samuel Halperin, and in view of the constraints imposed by Congress. But when ESEA emerged in 1965, the old Democratic standby pitch for general aid for teachers' salaries and construction was jettisoned in favor of a billion dollar categorical program of aid to the disadvantaged. And Cannon (who had pretty much given up on the public school system as hopeless-like USOE) and Gardner got their cherished supplementary education centers as potentially radical and expansive agents for educational innovation. It was a binger harvest in 1965, after so long a drought — but beyond the political and social and personal factors, with all the rancid human juice they evinced, there were also dry and impersonal fiscal and budgetary imperatives that crucially accelerated the legislative construction of the Great Society.

V

My second set of special circumstances is the logic and rhythm of presidential budgetary and fiscal policymaking. Two memoranda to the President from Gardner Ackley, chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, will serve to illustrate both the uniqueness and the brevity of the fiscal and budgetary opening that coincided with the passage of the ESEA and the HEA in the summer of 1965. On June 2, Ackley wrote Johnson that the CEA had met with eight of its senior academic consultants and all agreed that in light of a slowing growth rate, "they would like to see more fiscal stimulus in early 1966. In any case, they urged a strongly expansionary budget for fiscal 1967." On this note the budgetarily huge and fiscally redistributionist ESEA and HEA went roaring through. But by December of 1965, Ackley was calling for "a significant tax increase . . . to prevent an intolerable degree of inflationary pressure." By the fall of 1966, with rising inflation and Vietnam expenditures whipsawing the administration, Budget Director Charles Shultz wrote the President to warn about one major budget problem that stood out above all others:

That problem is simply that we are not able to fund adequately the new Great Society programs. At the same time, States, cities, depressed areas and individuals have been led to expect immediate delivery of benefits from Great Society programs to a degree that is not realistic. This leads to frustration, loss of credibility, and even deterioration of State and local services as they hang back on making normal commitments in order to apply for Federal aid which does not materialize. Backlog, queuing, and griping build up steadily.

Shultz was especially concerned because the burgeoning staff of Joseph Califano, who had replaced Bill Moyers as the ranking presidential aide in July of 1965, had cranked up the task force machinery to a fever pitch, thereby generating a profusion of new legislative proposals that would attract congressional and clientele support in a period of increasing fiscal deterioration that was certain to underfund even the existing Great Society programs.

. . . we are now in the process of developing a wide range of new legislative proposals . . . Adequate funding of already authorized Great Society programs will be a very tough problem even if there are no new programs . . . in the present budget situation I see very little hope of any significant expenditure buildup on existing Great Society programs . . . As I see it, the situation will get worse instead of better unless we decide to digest what we already have on our plate before reaching for more. We should be extremely selective in adopting new Task Force recommendations.

Yet while Schultz was writing, twelve new outside task forces—including William Friday's task force on education—and 34 interagency task forces—including Keppel's on education—were brain-storming toward new proposals, even while the recently enacted Great Society programs were already beginning to starve.

Recalling Califano's task force operation of 1966, the Budget Bureau's Harold Schultze was especially concerned because the burgeoning staff of Joseph Califano, who had replaced Bill Moyers as the ranking presidential aide in July of 1965, had cranked up the task force machinery to a fever pitch, thereby generating a profusion of new legislative proposals that would attract congressional and clientele support in a period of increasing fiscal deterioration that was certain to underfund even the existing Great Society programs.

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Seidman, who had been White House liaison for Donald Price's 1964 outside task force on government reorganization, complained that:

Task forceitis ran rampant. At least forty-five task forces were organized in the fall of 1966. Papers were circulated on an "eyes only" basis and when agency people were included on the task forces they were reluctant to tell even their bosses about what they were doing. The task force operation bred a miasma of suspicion and distrust without producing very much that was useable.\(^{37}\)

Seidman's complaint reflected the Budget Bureau's increasing concern that it was being squeezed out of the program planning process by Califano's growing staff,\(^ {38}\) and he was basically right about Califano's—and ultimately, of course, Johnson's—abuse of the task force device, with 46 in 1966 and 35 in 1967 busily generating program proposals while Vietnam and inflation crippled the budget, and the ghetto and campus beneficiaries of the Great Society programs began to riot.

But it is here that the historian's sense of the uniqueness of time and circumstance must assert itself. For to generalize abstractly about the utility of the task force device is to commit a social science. Far wiser is the immortal observation of Chief Dan George—that "Sometimes the magic works, sometimes it doesn't." The magic worked for John Gardner in 1964–65. In 1966, a sea change quietly set in; Vietnam and inflation heated up, and in the off-year elections the Republicans gained 47 seats in the House and three in the Senate. So the magic didn't work for William Friday in 1966–67. That sets the stage for my final set of unusual circumstances, which is especially curious because it centers on a vast contradiction.

VI

The files on the Friday task force on education of 1966–67 in the Johnson Presidential Library in Austin and in the National Archives (OMB Records Division) reveal an intensive effort by 14 unusually talented and experienced people whose 149-page report probed widely and imaginatively into the problems and options of educational policy, and boldly recommended (since they didn't have to pay the bill, at least not directly) a "moon shot" for the poor, a doubling of Title I expenditures, imaginative and aggressive methods for racial integration, and flirted with such novel notions as a free freshman year in college. William Friday recalled his task force's meeting with President Johnson in the White House on May 20, 1967, to deliver their report: "We talked about the report for maybe five minutes, and then he spent the next 45 minutes talking about Vietnam."\(^ {39}\)

So the far-reaching and expensive Friday proposals went nowhere. As was his custom, Califano appointed an interagency task force under Gardner to consider the Friday recommendations and price them out. Gardner bucked the chairmanship down to Keppel's successor as Commissioner of Education, Harold Howe III, and "Doc" Howe reported somewhat lamely to Califano in an "Eyes Only" memorandum of October 23, 1967 that his task force was so demoralized by the underfunding of existing programs that it could not faithfully recommend any of the new Friday proposals.\(^ {40}\) The report itself was prefaced by an unusually candid political analysis that denounced the growing gap between Great Society promises and budgetary reality, wherein appropriations for education programs were often only half of authorizations. Similarly, the 1968 interagency task force on education, nominally chaired by newly promoted HEW Secretary Wilbur Cohen, but actually chaired by Howe, recommended full funding for existing programs rather than creating new ones—"We have an overdose of underfunded legislation on the books."\(^ {41}\) Resentment in the agencies built up over the professional trespass of the outside task forces, and especially over the heavy-handedness of Califano's growing staff of young domestic policy planners. Samuel Halperin recalls:

I think Mr. Califano gave the impres-
sion from afar that he would only deal with Secretaries of Departments or with God Almighty—and then only grudgingly. Califano went to great lengths to make decisions. I don't believe he checked with the President on many key issues. With as few people around who knew the details of what was going on as possible, many of the decisions were made by him with a person such as Secretary Gardner who did not really know the substance and the detail of many of the proposals and couldn't be expected to. I found that Mr. Califano was arrogant, uninformed, bright but exceedingly thin because he was spread over such a broad area.42

By 1967–68, everyone was tired:

I had the impression, particularly in 1967, '68, of great haste, great superficiality. And political naivete of the highest order . . . the staff work of (James) Gaither and Califano doesn't begin to compare, for example, to the sophistication of the staff work that Mr. Cater engaged in, let's say, in '64–'65. I have to say that by '67–'68 perhaps all of us were doing sloppier work. We were over-extended, over-tired, and our morale left a lot to be desired.

Such exhaustion fits comfortably with our understanding of the cyclical flow and ebb of presidential power. So where is the contradiction?

The contradiction lies in the sustained output of Great Society legislation even into the eleventh hour of a lame-duck administration, which Johnson and his White House staff and his task forces pushed relentlessly, even in the face of Vietnam and soaring inflation and budget deficits and race riots and campus disorders. Even after Johnson announced his stunning decision not to run for re-election on March 31, 1968, Califano appointed 19 interagency task forces on topics as disparate as marine science, product test information, workmen's disability income—and two more on education.43

An acknowledged master of the legislative process, Johnson was also a master raconteur who cherished a revealing metaphor about the momentum of legislative interest groups. Douglass Cater recalls Johnson's fondness for the yarn about the country boy who on first seeing a locomotive doubted that they would ever get it going. But when he saw it build up steam and roar down the track, he concluded: "They'll never stop her."44 Hence Johnson would wheedle and beg for startup funds for new programs even while slashing the budget for established ones. Consider, then, the extraordinary profusion of Great Society legislation in lame-duck 1968 in the field of education alone, either in new programs or renewals: school breakfasts, the Indian Bill of Rights, bilingual education, dropout prevention, Aid to Handicapped Children, co-operative education, Networks for Knowledge, college tutoring, Talent Search, college housing, Education for the Public Service, international education, Teacher Corps, National Science Foundation, Arts and Humanities Foundation, NDEA, Law School Clinical Experience, HEA, Higher Education Facilities Act—the list rattles on. Typically, major renewal programs like the various ESEA titles received lower appropriations than they had enjoyed the previous year, but the new programs like bilingual and handicapped education got their budgetary camel's nose into the tent.

Clearly Johnson instinctively understood the coalescence of what political scientists had come to call "iron triangles."45 Indeed, Johnson's senior aide for education, Douglass Cater, had written one of the major books on the alliance-formation process, whereby clientele groups forged enduring bonds of mutual interest with congressional subcommittees who authorized and funded programs affecting their interests, and with agency officials who ran them.46 The classical examples of iron triangles are the agricultural extension network and the Army Corps of Engineers, and Hugh Heclo is right to remind us that the U. S. Office of Education is not the Army Corps of Engineers.47 But we know from the experience of the 1970s, when the education lob-
by's "Big Six" and Charles Lee's Committee on Full Funding turned back President Nixon's attempts to dismantle the Great Society programs in education (Nixon in fact ended up supporting a much heavier federal involvement in higher education), and also from the NEA's love affair with President Carter, that the triangular alliances forged in education were powerful indeed—and that it all basically started with Lyndon Johnson, and especially from his rather frenetic task forcing.

A final irony is that the relative immaturity of iron triangles in education in the early 1960s provided the Gardner outside task force of 1964 and the Keppel interagency task force of 1965 with unusual room to maneuver. But by the end of the Johnson administration, the very proliferation of Great Society programs that task forcing had spurred, in turn reinforced the growing network of iron triangles with a vested interest in maximizing their profit from the programmatic status quo. So Johnson and Gardner and Cater and Keppel and Cannon and Califano, all enjoyed their magic moment in the middle 1960s, and these extremely capable civil servants exploited it superbly. Their task forcing considerably short-circuited the HEW and USOE bureaucracies, and to the ironical degree to which they came eventually to represent the executive bureaucracies themselves, they gave themselves a kind of beneficent hotfoot.

But if the fastest game in that most political of towns in the 1960s was task forcing, by the 1970s the smart money was on the iron triangles that had flowed from the Great Society's programmatic largesse, and that ironically represented the Weberian triumph of bureaucratic hegemony that task forcing was designed to circumvent or subvert in the first place. Its ultimate triumph was President Carter's new cabinet-rank Department of Education, presided over by a federal judge who was a captive of the bureaucratic experts, and issuing in 1979 a ukase of regulations designed to reinforce the department's political demands that the states submit to the Great Society's most spectacularly disastrous educational program: bilingual education.49 But that is of course another story—and the archives aren't even open.

Notes
7. The standard cynical fun on such commissions is illustrated by a Punch version of Gilbert and Sullivan's iambic quadratometer, circa 1955:

If you're pestered by critics and hounded by faction
To take some precipitate, positive action,
The proper procedure, to take my advice, is
Appoint a commission to stave off the crisis.

A serious and able analysis of the American version is Thomas R. Wolanin, Presidential Advisory Commissions (Madison: University of Wis-

8. On the 1960 task forces, see Theodore C. Sorenson, Kennedy (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 234–40; transcript, Myer Feldman Oral History Interview, 29 May 1966, 291 passim, John F. Kennedy Library. The Kennedy task force reports were supposedly published in New Frontiers of the Kennedy Administration (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1961), but it is a botched job, with no identified editor, no introduction to explain the task force operation, and much confusion between the summer advisory committees and the 29 postelection task forces—in a book with only eleven task force report chapters—the twelfth chapter is Kennedy’s inaugural address. The Hovde task force report on education is included, but its membership list omits Dean Francis Keppel of Harvard.


13. Kennedy’s lone significant achievement in education, the Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963, was signed by President Johnson ten days after Kennedy’s assassination, although a strong case can be made that Kennedy’s omnibus drive of 1963, with its political emphasis on higher education, and with Commissioner Keppelin adroitly negotiating to find common ground between the NEA and the Catholic hierarchy, paved the way for post-assassination successes. In his January 21 Budget message, Johnson rather routinely asked for general aid grants to the states for teachers’ salaries and school construction, but with the exception of a new program for library services and construction which was passed as the Library Services Act of 1964, none of the new education proposals made it to the floor of Congress, and none was seriously pushed that year by the administration.

14. Others involved in coordinating the initial task forces were Gardner Ackley, Francis Bator, Douglass Cater, Myer Feldman Donald Hornig, Charles Schultz, Elmer Staats, and Lee White. An essential aid for researching the task force operations is “Presidential Task Force Operation During the Johnson Administration”, an 18-page guide prepared by Johnson Library archivist Nancy Kegan Smith in June 1978. See also “Policy Formulation During the Johnson Administration”, an unfinished 19-page speech drafted by aide James Gaither, but never delivered by President Johnson.


17. Memo, Bill Moyers to Gardner Ackley et al., 6 July 1964, Ex FG 600, Box 361, WHCF, Johnson Library.

18. Moyers’ official list of July 22, which is included in the text as List A, shows a slightly different configuration. The task force on civil rights never materialized, presumably because the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed on July 2. But two more task forces were added—on Environmental Pollution and on Programs to Improve the World-Wide Competitive Effectiveness of American Business—to bring the total to 13 task forces planning in 1964 for the 1965 legislative agenda.

19. President Johnson noted and resented this elitist skew in 1964 against the South (2) and the Midwest (5), and subsequent outside task forces were consciously broadened. William Friday’s outside task force on education in 1966, for instance, was more evenly balanced, with one university representative each from Harvard and Yale, Chicago and Wisconsin, UCLA and Cal Tech, North Carolina and Vanderbilt—plus the Superintendent of Public Instruction for Texas.


24. Transcript, Keppel Oral History, 21 April 1969, Johnson Library. Wilbur Cohen recalled the distinctive Johnsonian exhortation at the same meeting: "So I want you guys to get off your asses and do everything possible to get everything in my program passed as soon as possible, before the aura and the halo that surround me disappear. Don't waste a second. Get going right now. Larry, Wilbur—just remember I want this program fast, and by fast I mean six months, not a year." Quoted in Merle Miller, Lyndon: An Oral Biography (New York: Putnam's, 1980), 409.


27. The issue paper identified the dissimilar and often warring interest groups in the educational establishment as "the NEA, American Council on Education, National Catholic Welfare Council, [sic], Council of Chief State School Officers, American Association of School Administrators, AFL-CIO, the Chamber of Commerce, NAACP, National Council of Churches"—the competing claims of which had tended to produce turmoil and paralysis in the Congress.

28. Wilbur Cohen adds, perceptively, that the task force device was consistent with Johnson's triangular mode of decision-making or consensus-building, whereby he would seek a third opinion when confronted with a contested or controversial policy choice. In the sea of memoranda that flowed through his night reading, Johnson would check either the approve or disapprove box with surprising infrequency; rather, he would scribble instructions to check it out further with Bundy, or Clifford, or Fortas, or respected powerful figures on the Hill (but rarely with agency officials). See the transcript, Wilbur Cohen Oral History Interview, 8 December 1968, tape #3, 4–5, Johnson Library. Cohen's view of Johnson's "principle of triangulation" was reinforced in a personal interview with the author, 9 February 1981.

29. Memo, Cannon to the Director, 16 October 1964, Box 412, OMB Records Division, National Archives.

30. Memo, Cannon to Staff, 9 December 1964, Box 412, OMB Records Division, National Archives.

31. Similarly dim, though less extreme, views of OE are generally reflected in the memoranda of other such senior Budget Bureau staffers as William Carey, Emerson Elliott, Phillip Hughes, Harold Seidman, and Hirst Sutton.


33. In 1967, Congresswoman Edith Green led a states rights coalition of Republicans and conservative southerners in stripping Title III out of USOE and turning its control over to the state departments of education through block grants. Although Secretary Gardner and Commissioner Harold Howe III fought the transfer vigorously, Cannon contemptuously observed that the Office of Education had "excreted Title III like a foreign body".

34. Memo, Ackley to the President, 2 June 1965, FG 11–0 WHCF, Johnson Library.


36. Memo, Schultz to the President, 7 November 1966, Ex FI 4, WHCF, Johnson Library.


40. Memo, Howe to Califano, 23 October 1967, Box 39, Files of Douglass Cater, Johnson Library.

41. Summary Report, White House Task Force on Education, 11 October 1968, 1. No outside task forces were appointed in 1968. Califano's senior staff had institutionalized the practice of spring visits to prestige campuses to brainstorm for new ideas and to identify potential task force recruits.

42. Transcript, Samuel Halperin Oral History Interview, 24 February 1969, 10–11, Johnson Library.

43. One was Cohen's; the other was on higher Education and the Administration of Academic Science and Research Programs, co-chaired by
Ivan Bennett and Alice Rivlin.


