

Introduction

Political science emerged as an academic discipline in the United States in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The year 1880 figures as an important symbolic date, for in that year, the School of Political Science was formed at Columbia University under the directorship of John W. Burgess. This same year also lies at the exact midpoint between two other dates of institutional significance: 1857, the year in which Francis Lieber was named America's first professor of history and political science at Columbia, and 1903, the year in which the American Political Science Association (APSA) was founded. During this half-century, political science became an independent course of study, increasingly distanced not only from moral philosophy from which it evolved at colleges and universities around the country, but also from the other newly individuated social sciences, such as economics, psychology, and sociology. The professionalization of the various social sciences was also marked by the creation of independent associations that emerged (as somewhat belatedly did the APSA) out of the reformist American Social Science Association (ASSA).¹

Before the latter half of the nineteenth century, "political science" was a term used in the United States by publicists and statesmen of the American Enlightenment. Aware of the novelty of their task and the modernity of their context, these publicists and statesmen drew upon classical and modern sources to interpret and promulgate the republican experimentation and citizen education under way in the New World. Figures such as John Adams, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison alleged to draw upon, among others, Cicero, Grotius, Montesquieu, and Hume as inspirations for what Adams called "the divine science of politics" directly at work in republican America. In their writings and in those that followed them, "political science" provided a terminological framework to understand, debate, and reform national ideals,

1. See works on professionalization and on the social science associations cited in the General Introduction and in Dorothy Ross's essay below.

institutions, and processes. In the course of America's first half-century, they succeeded in bringing about "a new political science for a world itself quite new," which de Tocqueville had called for in 1835.²

This sense of America's novelty and uniqueness was carried over into the later nineteenth-century context, as "political science" increasingly became the name for a subject of higher education and a new academic discipline.³ The forces of modernization—especially secularization, nationalization, and democratization—at work on the American republic were also at work on political science itself. Another force of modernization—the centralization of the state—came to give political science its late-century identity as "the science of the state." "The national popular state alone," Burgess proclaimed, "furnishes the objective reality upon which political science can rest in the construction of a truly scientific political system." These sentiments of *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law* (1891) were prefigured in Lieber's *Manual of Political Ethics* (1838) and Theodore Dwight Woolsey's *Political Science: Or, the State Theoretically and Practically Considered* (1877), and they were seconded in W. W. Willoughby's *The Nature of the State* (1896) and the future president Woodrow Wilson's *The State: Elements of Historical and Practical Politics* (1889).

These works on the state displayed considerable differences, but they collectively provided a theoretical expression of nationalism in the period after the Civil War. They were concerned to explore the normative foundations of the modern nation-state, finding it in some combination of popular sovereignty, the organic community, the rule of law, and the natural liberties of citizens. But contrary to later misconceptions, they were even more concerned with explaining the state's governmental apparatus, legal structure, formal evolution, and practical manifestation in parties and public opinion. There was considerable methodological reflection attendant to this formal and empirical task as well. Some of this reflection praised natural science as a model for political science; some of it hailed the advances in the collection of statistics; and some of it insisted upon the inextricable connections between inquiries in history and in political science. In more concrete terms, it was what Wilson called the "historical, comparative method" that provided the main intellectual resources for understanding the American state in comparison to other states, past and present.

The administration of the state—or, as some thought, its veritable

2. John Adams, *Thoughts on Government*, in Charles S. Hyneman and Donald S. Lutz, eds., *American Political Writing during the Founding Era* (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1983), vol. 1, p. 402; Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969), p. 12.

3. For this development, see Anna Haddow, *Political Science in American Colleges and Universities: 1636–1900* (New York: Appleton, 1939).

absence—also came to focus the practical and political vision of political scientists. The point was not only to understand the state but to change it—if only to develop and modernize its administrative structure. The reformist agenda of the ASSA was taken up by the various new disciplinary associations, including the APSA. “Civil service reform” was particularly important for political scientists who hoped that administration might prove “businesslike.” Such reform was viewed by many political scientists like Wilson, whose words these are, as a requirement of “this industrial and trading age.” It could thereby be “removed from the hurry and strife of politics,” especially of a narrowly partisan or populist kind, and certainly from a socialist agenda advocated by certain sociologists such as Albion Small and certain economists such as Richard T. Ely. Following their republican forbears, political scientists generally avowed their moderation and what Lieber had called the “calming effect” of their science on students and civil servants. Despite considerable disagreements about what, if anything, should be reformed about national policy or race and gender relations, political scientists mainly ranged across the classical liberal spectrum, from Burgess’s modern conservatism to Wilson’s democratic idealism. In these various ways, political science in the latter half of the nineteenth century proved to be a science *of* politics and a science *for* politics in the changing new world that America most dramatically exemplified.

The essays that follow highlight some of the more important features of this brief sketch of the beginnings of a discipline. Lieber’s inaugural address (here much shortened) was delivered at Columbia College in early 1858 when he formally assumed the chair of history and political science that had been created for him the previous year. Warning his audience of “the threatened cleaving of this broad land,” Lieber begins his late antebellum address with a cry of nationalism and a call for a national university on the German model. Critical of “idolatrous patriotism,” communism, and much else, Lieber praises America’s unique liberties and republican institutions in a neo-Kantian way that underscores the mutuality of citizens’ rights and duties. Itself an exercise in civic education, the address goes on to identify political science as the science that treats of “man as a jural being—as citizen,” especially in “the highest institution—the state.” It also delineates the subfields of political science, including political economy, and demarcates its boundaries with history, “the very science for nascent citizens of a republic.”

The essays by John W. Burgess and Woodrow Wilson exemplify the focus as well as the range of thinking of Gilded Age scientists of the state. The differences are as important as the similarities. Burgess raises more abstract questions about the state, whereas Wilson surveys more practical ones about its administration. While Burgess simply nods in the direction of “a better organization of the state outside of the government,” Wilson explicitly advo-

cates reform of the civil service, as would Frank Goodnow, the APSA's first president. Wilson's advocacy of "the historical, comparative method" finds its complement in Burgess's boast (in the preface to *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law*; not printed here) that the novelty of his "comparative study" lies in its "attempt to apply the method, which has been so productive in Natural Science to Political Science and Jurisprudence." In practice, however, Burgess's method generally proved to be much more legalistic and formalistic, something that Wilson himself criticizes as dogmatic. Expressing the sense of New World uniqueness that many thinkers have since called American exceptionalism, Burgess emphasizes "the distinctive lessons of our institutions" when compared to those of European states; and Wilson insists that "we Americanize" the study of administration and allow civil servants to "inhale much free American air." Both political scientists also freely exhale the language of democracy, in rather marked contrast to earlier nineteenth-century writers. But we cannot look back without remembering the avowed features of such talk. Burgess's "democratic state" needed a "national harmony" based upon a consensus over "rights and wrongs" and upon what he hoped would become Teutonic racial homogeneity; Wilson's "democratic state" needed an expert bureaucracy far "removed from the common political life of the people, its chiefs as well as its rank and file." In short, in these essays we get a glimpse of the ambivalences about the meaning and extent of popular democracy that characterized late nineteenth-century political science in America.

Burgess and Wilson were professional political scientists, whatever else they were. Wilson's essay appeared in 1887 in the second volume of *Political Science Quarterly (PSQ)*, the new professional journal brought out by Burgess's School of Political Science at Columbia. Other journals and schools followed, as did other marks of a profession, especially the creation of a national association in 1903. W. W. Willoughby, another theorist of the state from Johns Hopkins's own school of political science, records this event in a brief note for the 1904 *PSQ*. Besides remembering the names of its founders and first officers—including Wilson, Goodnow, and Willoughby himself—the note calls attention to the collective judgments within the association about the three principal subfields of political science, the need for their methodical study, and their intellectual distance from "the other so-called social sciences." Disavowing any specifically "partisan position," the APSA nonetheless intended to include nonacademic members and to speak broadly to questions of practical politics.

In the two closing essays, disciplinary historians James Farr and Dorothy Ross place these various developments—and indeed the whole of late nineteenth-century political science—within different, broader frameworks. Farr looks closely at the mutual evolution of the concepts of "political sci-

ence” and “the state” not only in the writings of later nineteenth-century figures such as Burgess, Wilson, and Willoughby but in those of earlier Federalists and especially Francis Lieber. This broader intellectual context forces a considerable qualification on claims that Americans thought of themselves as “stateless” before the Gilded Age or were merely mimicking German theorists at the close of the century. It also allows us to see a conceptual unity amidst considerable theoretical diversity that characterized the intellectual formation of the discipline.

Noting many intellectual differences among the social sciences and providing considerable detail about the various individuals who brought them about, Ross nonetheless emphasizes the similar processes of their professionalization, as explained by university reform and—during Wilson’s “industrial and trading age”—the requirements for expert knowledge prompted by industrialization itself. Ross also reveals how a new generation of reform-minded experts turned to new conceptions and methods of science in order to break with traditionalists—only to have this metamorphose into scientism in the opening decades of the twentieth century.⁴ Charles E. Merriam stands out in this development; and the mention of his name takes us into the next period of political science.

4. Ross has recently explored this phenomenon more systematically and connected it expressly to American exceptionalism in *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).