

Historical Amnesia: Public Administration and the Second Founding

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This study critically examines the marginalization of the Second Founding period (1865–1877) in public administration scholarship, revealing a persistent *historical amnesia* that obscures its foundational impact on governance and social equity. By analyzing 67 articles and book chapters across leading public administration journals and handbooks, the study identifies key gaps in the literature, such as the limited engagement with the Reconstruction Amendments and the neglect of key organizations and figures like the Freedmen’s Bureau and Freedom Lawmakers. The findings suggest that acknowledging the Second Founding’s contributions can deepen the field’s commitment to social equity and reshape its understanding of historical narratives.

Keywords

second founding, historical amnesia, social equity, citizenship

The Second Founding period, from 1865 to 1877, was a transformative period in American history that redefined the nation’s approach to citizenship, rights, and governance. This era represented a profound shift in constitutional and social norms, aiming to repair the injustices brought by slavery and to lay the foundation for a more inclusive democracy. During this time, the Reconstruction amendments guaranteed freedom, citizenship, and voting rights to formerly enslaved individuals, thereby expanding the scope of civil rights and reshaping the relationship between the federal and state governments (Foner 2019). These amendments not only addressed the immediate aftermath of the Civil War but also set the stage for future civil rights advancements.

Despite the historical significance, public administration scholarship has exhibited *historical amnesia* by failing to fully incorporate the Second Founding’s contributions into its narratives. This *historical amnesia*—the selective omission or minimization of significant historical events and figures—has resulted in a critical gap in the understanding of how these foundational changes continue to impact modern governance and social equity. To guide our inquiry, we posed the follow-

ing research questions: (1) How has the field’s historical narrative reflected—or failed to reflect—this foundational period’s contributions to equity, citizenship, and governance? (2) What patterns of omission or marginalization appear in public administration’s treatment of Reconstruction, and what do these reveal about the field’s historical consciousness?

Second Founding and Its Relevance

The Reconstruction era was a pivotal period in U.S. history marked by significant constitutional and social changes aimed at rebuilding the nation after the Civil War. Known as the Second Founding because of its expansion of citizenship and voting rights, this time period witnessed the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments (Foner 2011). These Reconstruction Amendments—ratified between 1865 and 1870—abolished slavery (13th), guaranteed citizenship and equal protection (14th), and prohibited racial discrimination in voting (15th) (Foner 2011, 2019). Together, they reshaped American federalism, expanded civil rights, and laid a constitutional foundation for future equity-focused governance.

In addition to the Reconstruction era amendments, the Second Founding period saw a number of established grassroots and federal organizations, such as the Freedmen's Bureau (FB)—officially known as the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. The FB was established by the federal government in 1865 and aimed to assist formerly enslaved people and impoverished southerners by providing education, healthcare, and employment services (Couto 1991; Foner 2019). Despite its efforts, the FB was a part of a “sociopolitical earthquake” (Couto 1991, p. 133, quoting Gen. Oliver Otis Howard) and faced significant opposition and limitations. Yet, the FB represented a critical attempt by the federal government to address the immediate needs of newly freed individuals and to promote social stability in the post-Civil War South.

Another organization was the Brotherhood of Liberty (formerly known as the Mutual United Brotherhood of Liberty), which was a grassroots organization started in Baltimore, MD, in 1885. The organization's purpose was to build on the legacy of Reconstruction and create a more equitable system as well as resist northern efforts to segregate (Foner 2019). The Brotherhood of Liberty, while not as widely documented as other organizations, was a key advocacy group during Reconstruction. It sought to promote civil rights and social justice for African Americans and played a role in rallying support for the legislative changes of the era (Halpin 2019). Although only working within the Baltimore area during Reconstruction, the Brotherhood of Liberty laid the groundwork and was the predecessor to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The Brotherhood of Liberty took activism to the courts and helped to establish schools, lifted a ban on Black lawyers in Baltimore, and resisted efforts to segregate transportation systems (Halpin 2019).

Prominent figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Frederick Douglass significantly influenced the Reconstruction era's social and political landscape. Frederick Douglass, a former enslaved person and renowned abolitionist, advocated for civil rights and was a vocal supporter of the amendments that aimed to secure equality for African Americans (Douglass 2022 [1881]; Foner 2019). W.E.B. Du Bois emerged as a leading intellectual in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He emphasized the importance of higher

education and political activism for African Americans and his work built upon the legal and social advancements achieved during Reconstruction (Du Bois 2017 [1935]). Legislative efforts were championed by key figures, such as Thaddeus Stevens, Oliver Otis Howard, and the Freedom Lawmakers. The Freedom Lawmakers were over 1,500 African American men who served in office during the Reconstruction period (Foner 1996). Thaddeus Stevens was a leader of the Radical Republicans and was instrumental in pushing for the 14th and 15th Amendments as well as advocating for policies that aimed to ensure civil rights for African Americans (Foner 2019). General Oliver Otis Howard was the head of the Freedmen's Bureau and played a significant role in the FB's operations and its efforts to assist freed people in the South. The combined efforts of these leaders and their organizations underscore the complexity and challenges of implementing the Reconstruction amendments—from federal agencies to advocacy organizations—and provide insight into the sociopolitical climate of the Second Founding.

The *historical amnesia* in public administration is evident in the scant attention given to the grassroots and public agencies, like the Freedmen's Bureau, and key figures in existing literature, despite their pioneering role in social services. By overlooking the FB's contributions, public administration scholarship fails to recognize one of its earliest examples of an agency dedicated to equity and social justice.

Public Administration and the Second Founding

Public administration scholarship has largely overlooked the Second Founding, reflecting a critical *historical amnesia* that masks Reconstruction's vital role in shaping modern governance and advancing social equity. Despite the significance of the period from 1865 to 1877 in redefining citizenship, rights, and governance, the field's historical narratives often privilege the Progressive Era (spanning the world wars and Woodrow Wilson's presidency) or the New Deal as key moments of development for public administration. This tendency neglects the profound influence of the Second Founding, which established the constitutional and administrative groundwork for many of the equity-driven policies and practices that public administrators engage with today (Rosenbloom 1983; Trochmann 2022). The

Reconstruction Amendments, particularly the 14th Amendment, redefined the relationship between federal and state governments and set the stage for future civil rights advancements, yet their impact on public administration remains underexplored (Foner 2019).

The formalization of public administration as a discipline is commonly traced to Woodrow Wilson's 1887 essay "The Study of Administration" and Frank Goodnow's book, *Politics and Administration* in 1900, and institutionalized with the founding of the Maxwell School in 1924 and the American Society of Public Administration (ASPA) in 1939. Yet, this conventional chronology reflects a narrow understanding of what constitutes the field's historical foundations. These milestones mark the field's academic and professional consolidation, but they are often treated as disconnected from earlier governance practices that shaped the federal role in promoting rights and equity. Our argument is not that Reconstruction should replace the Progressive Era as the genesis of public administration, but rather that the administrative efforts of the Second Founding—particularly those centered on newly recognized rights and social transformation—ought to be recognized as part of the broader genealogy of the field. Situating Reconstruction within public administration's historical narrative allows us to consider how values of social equity were present in federal action long before they were codified as professional norms of academic subfields.

Further, while public administration had not yet emerged as a self-aware academic discipline during Reconstruction, administrative practices nonetheless played a critical role in shaping the governance landscape of the post-war United States (Lieberman 1994; Skowronek 1982). For example, institutions like the Freedmen's Bureau were engaged in what we understand as public administration praxis: coordinating public services, managing bureaucratic systems, and navigating federal-state tensions (Couto 1991; Du Bois 2017; Foner 2019). These early experiments in equity-oriented governance deserve greater recognition within the field's historiography.

The constitutional foundations—such as the rule of law, separation of powers, and federalism—are central to public administration's understanding of governance and equity (Rosenbloom 1983; Trochmann 2022). Public administrators not only implement policies but also shape the application of these principles through their work, thus directly impacting social equity. While some

authors have recently begun to incorporate the missing narrative of the Second Founding into public administration literature (see Moloney and Lewis 2024), overall, the field's scholarship has shown a glaring gap in attention to how the Second Founding's amendments, organizations, and figures have shaped public administration's evolution.

While the 14th Amendment is frequently referenced in legal and policy contexts, its administrative significance is often superficially acknowledged. Many of the manuscripts merely mention it as landmark legislation without providing the historical context necessary to understand its transformative role in redefining the scope of civil rights and public governance. This superficial engagement not only diminishes the amendment's significance but also perpetuates a narrative that ignores the era's radical restructuring of governance to protect individual rights and promote social equity. The tendency to treat the 14th Amendment as a mere legal milestone, rather than as a constitutional and administrative turning point, is a clear manifestation of *historical amnesia* within the field.

The same pattern of *historical amnesia* is evident in the treatment of organizations like the Freedmen's Bureau. The Bureau is occasionally noted for its role in delivering social services, yet its pioneering efforts as an early public administration agency are seldom recognized. Established to provide education, health-care, and employment assistance to newly freed individuals, the Freedmen's Bureau was a model of federal intervention in social welfare. Despite its shortcomings, the Bureau's work laid the groundwork for future administrative approaches to equity and justice. By neglecting to explore the Bureau's contributions to the development of federal social service programs, public administration scholarship overlooks a critical chapter in its own history.

Moreover, key figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Frederick Douglass, and the Freedom Lawmakers—over 1,500 African American men who served in office during the Reconstruction period—are often excluded from public administration histories. These individuals were instrumental in advocating for policies and practices that sought to actualize the promises of the Reconstruction Amendments, yet their contributions are often marginalized or ignored. This oversight not only distorts the history of public administration but also reinforces a limited view of the field's development, one

that is disconnected from the racial and social dynamics that have historically shaped governance in the United States (Alexander and Stivers, 2020; Blessett et al. 2019; Ray, Herd, and Moynihan 2023; Riccucci 2019).

Other disciplines have a long history of exploring the Second Founding; and for most of the 20th century, the Reconstruction historiography was dominated by more “traditional interpretation[s] that portrayed the years following the Civil War as ones of unrelieved sordidness in political and social life” (Foner 1982, p. 82; see also Meier 1981; Weisberger 1959). It was not until after revisionism and post-revisionism¹ that historians began to emphasize the achievements during Reconstruction and focus on constructing a more realistic portrait of the era overall (Butchart 1980; Cox 1985; Jones 1980). Addressing this *historical amnesia* in public administration is essential for advancing social equity within the field. Social equity, as argued by scholars like Gooden (2023) and Johnson and Svava (2011), should not be treated as an add-on to public administration but as a core principle that is deeply rooted in the Second Founding. The Reconstruction Amendments—particularly the 14th Amendment’s equal protection clause—provided a constitutional basis for many of the equity-driven policies and anti-discrimination measures that public administrators are tasked with enforcing today. Yet, by neglecting the Second Founding’s role in establishing these principles, the field risks reinforcing a narrow understanding of its own history, one that fails to acknowledge its entanglement with struggles for racial and social justice.

Our analysis of 67 articles and book chapters across top-tier public administration publications revealed that while themes of social equity are increasingly prevalent, they are often disconnected from the historical context of the Second Founding. Discussions of the 14th Amendment, for example, frequently frame it as a legal benchmark rather than a turning point that funda-

mentally altered the trajectory of American governance and public administration. Similarly, references to the Freedmen’s Bureau and other Reconstruction-era organizations are often cursory, failing to acknowledge their administrative innovations and their contributions to the field’s development.

The implications of this *historical amnesia* extend beyond academic discourse. By overlooking the Second Founding’s contributions to social equity, public administration scholarship risks marginalizing the very principles of justice and fairness that it seeks to promote. A more inclusive history would recognize the Second Founding not merely as a historical episode but as a foundational moment that continues to inform contemporary practices and debates in public administration.

Revisiting the Second Founding through the lens of public administration offers an opportunity to rectify this *historical amnesia* and deepen the field’s commitment to social equity. By integrating the Second Founding into our understanding of public administration’s history, we can more accurately reflect the discipline’s evolution and its ongoing engagement with equity and justice. The lessons of the Second Founding are increasingly relevant as contemporary public administrators grapple with issues such as systemic racism, police reform, and disparities in healthcare and education. Understanding this period as a foundational moment for public administration reframes the history of the field as one that has always been entangled with struggles for social justice and equity (McCandless and Larson 2018).

Methodology

To explore how the Second Founding has been discussed in public administration histories and identify potential gaps in scholarship, we conducted a systematic literature review using a structured search and coding process. Our goal was to determine the extent to which the Reconstruction era’s contributions to governance and social equity have been integrated into public administration scholarship and to identify underlying patterns of omission or marginalization that reveal a historical amnesia within the field.

Data Collection and Article Selection

We began by searching three academic databases—JSTOR, LexusNexus, and Google Scholar—using the phrase “his-

1. Revisionism in the 1960s presented Reconstruction as a time of progress and golden opportunity that was lost. The more optimistic assumptions were that Reconstruction governments were “not as bad as they had been portrayed” in previous research (Foner 1982, 83). However, the post-revisionist movement in the 1970s questioned the extent of accomplishments during Reconstruction (see Sansing 1978). These works scrutinized the depth and permanence of the changes enacted, suggesting that while there were advancements, many were superficial or short-lived.

tory of public administration.” This initial search yielded 15 articles from Google Scholar and JSTOR² that provided a baseline understanding of how public administration’s historical narratives have framed foundational periods, such as the Second Founding, and their influence on the field. These results are shown in Table 1. These initial results included both peer-reviewed journal articles and chapters from widely circulated handbooks, including *The Handbook of American Public Administration* (2018) and *The Handbook of Teaching Public Administration* (2021). While not journal articles, these sources were selected due to their relevance to how public administration history is taught and understood.

Next, to ensure a more comprehensive dataset, we expanded our search with a Web of Science search. We searched “public administration” and various key words, including “Second Founding,” “Reconstruction Era,” and “Fourteenth Amendment.”³ Across all search criteria, we identified 16 total articles. Of these 16 articles, one was a duplicate (Trochmann 2022) from other searches and 13 were removed as they were outside the

2. There were no results found in LexusNexus.

scope of our study. The remaining two results can be found in Table 2.

Finally, we chose to include these key terms associated with the Second Founding: “Second (2nd) Founding,” “13th Amendment,” “14th Amendment,” “15th Amendment,” and “Freedmen’s Bureau,” across 10 leading public administration journals: *Public Administration Review*, *International Journal of Public Administration*, *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, *Public Administration*, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, *American Review of Public Administration*, *Administration & Society*, *Governance*, *Policy & Society*, and *Public Integrity*. This secondary search identified an additional 80 journal articles/media reviews. Of these results, five were duplicates—for example, Trochmann (2022; twice in journal archive search); Hall (2022); Ray, Herd, and Moynihan (2023); and Alexander and Stivers (2020). Once these

3. Search terms included: “Second Founding”; “Reconstruction Era”; “Reconstruction” and “United States”; “Reconstruction” and “History”; “14th Amendment”; “Fourteenth Amendment”; “15th Amendment”; “Fifteenth Amendment”; “13th Amendment”; “Freedmen’s Bureau”; and “W.E.B. Du Bois”

Table 1. First Round of Collection—JSTOR and Google Scholar

Search Engine	Source	Author(s)	Year
Google Scholar	Administrative Theory & Praxis	Raadschelders, et al.	2000
	Administrative Theory & Praxis	Heckler and Rouse	2023
	Public Administration Review	Karl	1976
	Administration and Society	Luton	1999
	Int’l Journal of Public Administration, Management and Economic Development	Bincof and Sait Çetin	2023
	Handbook of Teaching Public Administration (book)	McDonald, Hatcher, and Abbott	2022
	A History of Public Administration in the United States: The Rise of American Bureaucracy (book)	Lee	2023
JSTOR	Handbook of American Public Administration (book)	Federman	2018
	Public Administration Review	Rosser	2010
	Public Administration Review	McGuire	2012
	Public Administration Review	Holzer and Zhang	2009
	Public Administration Review	Svara	2014
	Journal of Public Affairs Education	Gibson and Stolcis	2006
	Public Administration Quarterly	Farazmand	1996
	European Perspectives for Public Administration: The Way Forward	Hustedt, Randma-Liiv, and Savi	2020

Table 2. Web of Science Search—Broken Down by Searched Terms

Search Term	2nd Search Term	Journal Source	Author(s)	Year
“Public Administration”	“Reconstruction”	Political Science Quarterly	Burns	1936
	“14th Amendment”	Public Administration Review	Christensen and Wise	2009

duplicates were removed, 75 articles were downloaded. Each article was reviewed and cataloged with metadata including author(s), year of publication, journal or book source, and DOI.⁴ After an initial review, we excluded 25 articles that did not align with the research focus. This exclusion process left 50 articles for systematic coding and thematic analysis. Table 3 gives a breakdown of the articles based on the searched term, what journal they were found in, and what years they were published.

From all three searches, we received a total of 111 book chapters, articles, and media reviews. As discussed earlier, we removed six total duplicates from the collection (five from the journal archives search and one from the Web of Science search) and 38 articles that were not relevant to the research questions. For example, some articles referenced “Second Founding” in unrelated contexts, such as the establishment of the Federal Reserve or German administrative structures. Other removed articles were gathered for referencing using the words “Reconstruction” or “Amendments” but were not referring to the United States context (i.e., articles referenced the Canadian, Nepalese, or Chinese governments). These articles were outside the scope of our inquiry, and this left our dataset with 67 articles.

Coding and Thematic Analysis

Our analysis consisted of two rounds of coding. The first round focused on identifying key terms and phrases within each article. We used a deductive coding process, specifically looking for references to: “14th Amendment,” “Woodrow Wilson,” “Second

4. While gathering data, any journal articles or book chapters that mentioned the words or phrase were retrieved from the respective website, downloaded, and the PDFs were saved into a shared drive folder. The data was then input into a spreadsheet where the following information was broken down: the author(s) last name(s), year of publication, the source it was published in (i.e., journal or book), what search engine produced the article, the DOI, and the link to the original website.

Founding,” “Freedmen’s Bureau,” “Reconstruction,” “New Deal,” and “history of public administration.” This initial coding allowed us to highlight specific references to the Reconstruction era and assess how frequently these concepts appeared in the literature. During the second round, we consolidated these codes into broader themes that aligned with our research questions, emphasizing the historical foundations of public administration and discussions around citizenship, race, and social equity. These codes included “13th Amendment,” “15th Amendment,” “Frederick Douglass,” “W.E.B. Du Bois,” “Thaddeaus Stevens,” “Oliver Otis Howard,” “U.S. Grant,” “Brotherhood of Liberty,” “Freedom Lawmakers,” “Racial Dynamic” (which had subcategories of “Segregation” and “Slavery”), and “Citizenship” (which had a subcategory of “Racial”).

The lead author conducted the primary coding of all documents. Throughout the coding process, the coauthors met regularly to review progress, discuss code applications, and address any questions or concerns. These meetings allowed us to refine our coding framework and ensure consistency in interpretation. While we did not calculate a formal inter-coder reliability statistic, this iterative and dialogic approach supported a shared understanding of how the codes were applied across the qualitative dataset (O’Connor and Joffe 2020).

The coding process yielded two major themes that underpinned our findings: (1) the selective use of historical context in public administration literature and (2) the limited focus on citizenship and inclusion within U.S. democracy, particularly in relation to the Reconstruction Amendments. In total, 909 codes were applied across the 67 documents. Table 4 is a visual breakdown of the codes.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the articles revealed notable patterns and significant gaps in how public administration

Table 3. Second Round of Collection—Articles Broken Down by Searched Term and Journal Source

Search Term	Journal Source	Author(s)	Year
“Second Founding”	Public Administration Review	Trochmann	2022
“14th Amendment”	Administration & Society	deHaven-Smith and Witt	2013
		deHaven-Smith and Witt	2009
		Hale	1979
		Lucio	2009
		Oldfield	2011
		Robbin	2000
	Administrative Theory & Praxis	Blanco	2021
		Heckler	2017
		Witt	2006
	American Administration Review	Hall	2022
	American Review of Public Administration	Kellough	2022
		Kellough	1991
		Kim	2021
		Wright	1971
	International Journal of Public Administration	Barbisan	1971
		Barbisan	2011
		Hartmus	2014
		Hickey, Reid, and Derr	1996
		Lane and Wamsley	1998
		Ringquist and Clark	2002
		Tummala	1991
	Public Administration Review	Ward	2003
	Public Integrity	Akinson et al	2022
		Conyers and Fields	2021
		deHaven-Smith and Kouzmin	2011
		Golembeski et al.	2022
		Klingner	2022
		Darling	2020
“Freedmen’s Bureau”	Administration & Society	Alexander and Stivers	2020
		Couto	1991
	American Review of Public Administration	Riccucci	2007
	Public Administration Review	Raadschelders	2008
	Public Integrity	Rosenson	2014
“13th Amendment”	Public Administration Review	Rollins and Hilliard	2017
		Dement	2023
		Chan and Rosenbloom	2009
		Rosenbloom	2007
	Administrative Theory & Praxis	Krewson and Matheis	2021
		Staniševski	2014
	Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory	Ray, Herd, and Moynihan	2023
	American Review of Public Administration	Moloney and Lewis	2024

Search Term	Journal Source	Author(s)	Year
		Brown	1970
		Rosenbloom and Piotrowski	2005
		White	1967
	Public Integrity	Lopez-Littleton and Woodley	2018
		Riccucci	2019
“15th Amendment”	Public Administration Review	Berry-James, Gooden, and Johnson	2020
		Williams	2017
	Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory	Liang	2016
	American Review of Public Administration	Blessett	2020
	Public Integrity	Portillo, Bearfield, and Riccucci	2021

Table 4. Code Breakdown

Code	Total number of references	Total number of articles with this reference
2nd (Second) Founding	4	1
Freedmen’s Bureau (FB)	72	7
Brotherhood of Liberty	1	1
Freedom Lawmakers	0	0
13th Amendment	24	15
14th Amendment	126	37
15th Amendment	19	11
Reconstruction	61	15
New Deal	51	14
History of Public Administration	62	21
Racial Dynamic	79	25
Slavery	98	21
Segregation	59	15
Citizenship	35	20
Citizenship – Racial	23	11
Woodrow Wilson	140	21
Oliver Otis Howard	16	1
W.E.B. Du Bois	35	6
Thaddeus Stevens	1	1
U.S. Grant	1	1
Frederick Douglass	2	2
Total	909	

scholarship addresses the Second Founding period. Two key themes emerged from our coding and thematic analysis: the role of history in shaping public administration and the discussions of citizenship and inclusion within U.S. democracy. The first theme highlights how historical context is selectively used in

the literature, often prioritizing certain periods like the Progressive Era while neglecting the Reconstruction era’s contributions. The second theme underscores the limited attention given to the Reconstruction Amendments’ influence on contemporary understandings of citizenship and governance, particularly in terms of

social equity. Together, these themes point to a pervasive pattern of *historical amnesia* within the field that diminishes the Second Founding's legacy and its ongoing impact on public administration. The following sections explore these themes in depth, emphasizing how this oversight perpetuates a narrow understanding of the field's historical development and its implications for current public administration practices.

History of U.S. Public Administration

The role that history plays in the current discussions of public administration is that the discussed time periods are handpicked to only show the relevant time period that the author(s) needed to make their argument. Within the 67 articles, those that chose to discuss the historical foundations of public administration had consistencies across them—depending on how far back the author(s) chose to go. Most often, authors start the history of public administration in the post-Civil War or Progressive era and rarely mention the Revolutionary War period and its aftermath. In the few articles in the dataset that chose to include the American Revolution and post-Revolutionary period, it was usually about the first founding fathers (such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, or Alexander Hamilton) or the Constitution and the rapid growth seen immediately after the Revolution. A few articles jumped directly to Woodrow Wilson and the World Wars I and II period, not citing any part of the Revolutionary War, Civil War, or any major policies previous to the world wars, except to mention their occurrence.

The articles that began their histories of public administration at the Civil War era were often discussing race and racism in the modern United States. Broken down below, the articles that did discuss the Reconstruction era amendments (13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments) also most often discussed the way one or any of these amendments impacted politics and public administration. The 13th Amendment abolished slavery. The 14th guaranteed equality and citizenship for anyone born in the United States. And, the 15th gave Black men, who were citizens, the right to vote. These amendments fundamentally changed the powers of the federal government and expanded citizenship—and with it, the United States entered into a second-founded republic.

The 14th Amendment appears frequently in our dataset—coded 126 times across 37 of the 67 documents—but its importance is often only superficially

addressed. In many of the articles (17 of 37), it is briefly mentioned as a landmark legislation often alongside the Civil Rights Acts or coupled with the 13th and 15th Amendments. A smaller subset of the documents (seven of 37) delves more deeply into how the 14th Amendment shaped the interpretation of citizenship, either within the text itself or through rulings by lower courts and the Supreme Court. The majority of discussion among the documents (16 of 37) focuses on the Equal Protection Clause, affirmative action, and due process, highlighting this Amendment's influence on both establishing and sustaining these concepts. However, only three (of 37) of the documents contextualize the 14th Amendment historically, and only four documents (of 37) explicitly examine the era in detail and relate it to the broader field of public administration or policy.

While scholars have begun to amplify counternarratives in public administration history, our investigation into how public administration history is portrayed revealed a glaring gap in scholarly discourse. First, contrary to discussions of the 14th Amendment, the other Reconstruction Amendments were not as prominent within the documents: the 15th Amendment was coded for 19 times in only 11 (out of the 67) documents and the 13th Amendment was coded for 24 times in 15 of the articles. Next, out of 67 published journal articles and book chapters analyzed, only one (1) book review mentions the term “Second Founding.” Trochmann's (2022) review focuses on how public administration can and should leverage the historical analysis of the Second Founding as discussed in the Pulitzer Prize-winning book *The Second Founding: How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution* (2019) by Eric Foner, as an important counternarrative that traditional public administration texts often miss.

The final gap is the lack of attention to groups and people during the Second Founding. Groups such as the Freedmen's Bureau (coded for 72 times), the Brotherhood of Liberty (coded for one time), and the Freedom Lawmakers (0), were rarely discussed, if at all mentioned. The Freedmen's Bureau was more often used as a one-time example to showcase “color conscious relief programs” post-Civil War (Ricucci 2007) or as an example of post-Civil War social policies (Moloney and Lewis 2024; Raadschelders 2008).

Of the documents analyzed, only two (Alexander and Stivers 2020; Couto 1991) provided more than a passing reference to the Freedmen's Bureau. While Alexander

and Stivers (2020) mention the Bureau just three times, they offer a substantive discussion of its role during Reconstruction, emphasizing how Black Americans used it as a tool to advocate for their interests through government. In contrast, Couto (1991) presents the Freedmen's Bureau as one of two case studies of "heroic bureaucracies." In Couto's article, he explores its involvement in education, local governance, and philanthropy—highlighting efforts to establish schools, negotiate land and labor contracts, and support formerly enslaved people after the Civil War. Couto's (1991) work stands out as one of the comprehensive examination of examinations of the Freedmen's Bureau's influence on U.S. history and its contributions to equity in American society.

Important figures, such as Oliver Otis Howard (16), commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau; Thaddeus Stevens (1); U.S. Grant (1); or Frederick Douglass (2), an activist, abolitionist, orator, and considered a Founding Father of the Second Founding, from that period receive little to no attention and were only discussed in tandem with the Freedmen's Bureau, if at all, in any of the documents analyzed. W.E.B. Du Bois, the civil rights activist and scholar, was either referred to or one of his works was cited 35 times in six (of 67) articles examined. In these six articles, he was used with discussion of his scholarship and activism (see Moloney and Lewis 2024 as an example), but in Couto (1991) and Alexander and Stivers (2020) he was discussed in tandem with the Freedmen's Bureau.

Other historical periods, such as World Wars I and II, were discussed more in depth, likely due to public administration scholarship expanding during this period. The most discussed aspect of this period was the role Woodrow Wilson played in the "founding" of public administration literature and the expansion of the bureaucracy post-New Deal. Wilson was mentioned or cited in text 140 times across 21 of the 67 documents. Commonly recognized as the field's founder, his frequent appearance in the literature is unsurprising. However, there is little critical engagement with the complexities of his legacy—especially his racist viewpoints—with few exceptions (see Alexander and Stivers 2020; Moloney and Lewis 2024).

Citizenship and Equity in U.S. Public Administration

The second theme that came about from our dataset was citizenship, and while it was a recurring discussion

throughout many of the articles analyzed, it was rarely defined and more often defined by who was or is excluded (such as women, enslaved people, immigrants, etc.) or it was noted as an "exclusive concept" (Lucio 2009). Only Alexander and Stivers (2020) define citizenship as "a guarantee of legal and political protection from raw, coercive power" (citing Janoski and Gran 2002, n.p.). Yet, many of the articles discuss the characteristics of a "good" or "active" and engaged citizen (such as Kim 2021 and Lucio 2009). Others illustrate it as an administrative standard within racialized burdens of the bureaucracy (see Ray, Herd, and Moynihan 2023) or discuss citizenship within social movements and activists (see Moloney and Lewis 2024). As the theme of citizenship, especially in a historical context pre-Reconstruction is tied to white, property-owning men, it was a main focus in the Reconstruction era. In the 11 (out of 67) articles that included discussions of citizenship in terms of racial identity, the discussion revolved around political action, the 14th Amendment, slavery, and expansion of rights, as well as historically placed citizenship into conversation with the Constitution, the American Revolution era, and the constitutionality of expanded rights.

An additional finding that was not originally searched for was the discussion of citizenship, gender, and gender roles within this data set. As diversity within public administration has emerged so too has the subject of women and gender-oriented topics within the U.S. democracy (Bishu, Guy, and Heckler 2019; Stivers, 2019). From within the dataset, McGuire (2012) discusses many influential female activists, such as Mary Anderson, and the roles they played in post-1920s America. In addition to little discussion around the Freedmen's Bureau, McGuire (2012) was the only article to mention or describe the "Women's Bureau" and also deserves further consideration.

Taken together, these findings address both of our guiding research questions. First, we found that while public administration literature occasionally references the Second Founding—most often through brief mentions of the 14th Amendment—it rarely engages with the period's broader contributions to equity, citizenship, and federal governance. Second, our thematic analysis revealed recurring patterns of marginalization, including superficial treatment of key constitutional amendments, limited acknowledgment of early equity-focused institutions like the Freedmen's Bureau, and the near

absence of figures such as Howard, Du Bois, and Stevens. These omissions suggest a historiographical pattern shaped not by lack of relevance, but by selective disciplinary memory—what we refer to as *historical amnesia*.

Conclusion

The Second Founding period remains a cornerstone of American constitutional and social history, yet its contributions to public administration have been obscured by a persistent *historical amnesia* within the field. Our analysis reveals that despite the significance of the period from 1865 to 1877 in reshaping American governance, public administration literature often addresses the era in fragmented or superficial ways (see Table 5). This amnesia not only distorts the historical narrative of the field but also perpetuates a limited understanding of the principles of social equity that many organizations and people sought to implement. References to the 14th Amendment, for instance, are frequently mentioned but not fully contextualized, diminishing the amendment's transformative impact on the relationship between federal and state governments and on the advancement of civil rights.

Moreover, while the 14th Amendment was mentioned in 126 instances across 37 documents, discussions often lacked depth and failed to connect to broader themes of equity and governance. Similarly, our findings highlight the lack of attention to the 13th and 15th Amendments, which were referenced only 24 and 19 times, respectively, across the entire dataset. This gap points to a broader tendency within the field to marginalize foundational legal changes that have had a lasting influence on the field's development.

We also found a glaring lack of attention to critical organizations and figures from the Second Founding period. The Freedmen's Bureau, although coded 72 times, was often relegated to a brief mention without recognizing its pioneering role as an early public administration agency. Furthermore, figures like Oliver Otis Howard, Thaddeus Stevens, and the Freedom Lawmakers, who played instrumental roles in shaping Reconstruction policies, were scarcely discussed. Only two articles engaged deeply with the Freedmen's Bureau as a case study or historical example of a "heroic bureaucracy" (Alexander and Stivers 2020; Couto 1991). This selective engagement reinforces a limited historical narrative that undermines the contributions of Black

leaders and marginalized groups to the foundations of public administration.

Additionally, our findings emphasize that while themes of citizenship and inclusion were prevalent in the literature, they were often framed in exclusionary terms. Discussions of citizenship rarely extended beyond the context of white, property-owning men, further perpetuating the *historical amnesia* that minimizes the struggles and achievements of marginalized communities during the Second Founding.

This historical oversight has real implications for how public administration understands and addresses issues of social equity today. As public administrators confront complex challenges such as systemic racism, immigration, and disparities in public service delivery, a more inclusive engagement with the Second Founding can provide a richer framework for understanding the field's role in promoting justice and equitable governance. A more comprehensive integration of the Second Founding into public administration historiography would not only correct the record but also reinforce the discipline's commitment to social equity as a foundational principle, rather than an afterthought.

We call on scholars and practitioners to engage more deeply with the Second Founding and to move beyond fragmented references to the 14th Amendment and Reconstruction-era policies. To this day, some of the most transformative decisions come from interpretations of Reconstruction Amendments, such as the role the 14th Amendment played in *Brown v. Board of Education* (outlawing segregation in schools) or *Obergefell v. Hodges* (establishing the right for gay marriage). Yet, most people do not know much about this period or see how it impacts current politics and culture. A fuller exploration of this period reveals its enduring relevance for contemporary discussions on equity, social justice, and the administrative state's role in safeguarding civil rights. By critically engaging with the Second Founding, we encourage scholars to challenge the field's dominant narratives, which often omit or minimize the contributions of marginalized groups and overlook the period's foundational impact on the evolution of governance.⁵

Greater engagement with the Second Founding period—particularly the administrative leadership of fig-

5. Ceballos' (2024) study of the Civil War and Emancipation offers insights—not just into how the federal government embedded social equity into governance—but offers a space to understand the limitations and problems.

Table 5. Thematic Findings and Gaps

Theme	Key Patterns Identified	Representative Codes / Frequency	Observed Gaps
<p>History of U.S. Public Administration</p>	<p>Historical narratives often prioritize the Progressive Era or New Deal as origin points for the field, with limited engagement with the Reconstruction era as a foundational moment. The 14th Amendment is the most frequently mentioned Reconstruction amendment but is typically treated as landmark legislation without deeper administrative context; the 13th and 15th Amendments appear rarely and are most often referred to with each other or the 14th Amendment. Key Reconstruction-era organizations, such as the Freedmen’s Bureau, are more often used as brief examples of post–Civil War relief than analyzed as early public administration agencies.</p>	<p>14th Amendment (126 refs / 37 articles); 15th Amendment (19 / 11); 13th Amendment (24 / 15); Freedmen’s Bureau (72 / 7); Brotherhood of Liberty (1 / 1); Freedom Lawmakers (0); Oliver Otis Howard (16 / 1); W.E.B. Du Bois (35 / 6); Thaddeus Stevens (1 / 1); Frederick Douglass (2 / 2); U.S. Grant (1 / 1)</p>	<p>Limited historical contextualization of the Reconstruction Amendments; near absence of other Reconstruction institutions and figures from PA historiography; few deep analyses (only Couto 1991; Alexander and Stivers 2020 provide sustained discussion of the Freedmen’s Bureau).</p>
<p>Citizenship and Equity in U.S. Public Administration</p>	<p>Citizenship is often framed by exclusion (e.g., white, property-owning men) rather than as an inclusive concept shaped by Reconstruction’s expansion of rights. Discussions of racialized citizenship appear in only a handful of articles and are often tied narrowly to political action, the 14th Amendment, or slavery. Few definitions of citizenship are provided, and intersectional considerations (e.g., gender) are rare.</p>	<p>Citizenship (35 refs / 20 articles); Citizenship – Racial (23 / 11)</p>	<p>Limited connection between Reconstruction-era expansions of rights and contemporary equity concerns; minimal engagement with gender and intersectionality; few articles define citizenship beyond exclusionary terms.</p>

ures like Oliver Otis Howard, the intellectual framing of W. E.B. Du Bois or Frederick Douglass, and the policy work of Thaddeus Stevens—could have offered the field early models of equity-centered governance. As the first commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau, Howard oversaw federal efforts to establish schools, distribute food and clothing, mediate labor contracts, and protect the civil rights of freed people—functions closely aligned with modern public service. Du Bois, in the book *Black*

Reconstruction in America, offered a foundational analysis of how formerly enslaved people, in alliance with radical Republicans, sought to build a democratic public rooted in justice and collective participation. Stevens championed expansive federal intervention during Reconstruction, including land redistribution and civil rights enforcement, anticipating future debates about the role of public administrators in advancing equity. Institutions such as the Freedmen’s Bureau served as precursors to

contemporary public administration efforts aimed at racial and economic justice. Had these efforts been more fully integrated into the discipline's canon, public administration might have more robustly embraced social equity as a foundational rather than supplementary concern. We encourage future scholarship to explore what the field might have learned from these early experiments in federal social services, rights-based governance, and inclusive civic leadership.

The findings also point to the broader limitations of public administration's historiography. The field has often failed to grapple with the administrative legacies of colonialism and empire, both in the United States and globally (Roberts 2019). From the governance structures imposed during U.S. territorial expansion and Indigenous and First Nations displacement to the bureaucratic apparatus of European imperial regimes, colonial administration offers another critical site of inquiry for understanding how race, exclusion, and state power were codified through administrative means (Felten and von Oertzen 2020; Vogler 2019). We encourage scholars to widen their research lens to examine how these colonial legacies have shaped public administration as both a profession and a discipline, expanding the conversation beyond U.S. Reconstruction to include transnational and decolonial perspectives.

To redress *historical amnesia* in public administration, scholars must not only recover overlooked figures and events but also interrogate the disciplinary structures that sustain selective memory (see Bearfield et al. 2023; Berry-James et al. 2021; Blessett 2015, 2020; Blessett et al 2016; Ceballos 2024; Moloney and Lewis 2024; Nickels and Leach 2021). This includes critically examining how textbooks, professional associations, and curricula have reinforced a narrow canon that privileges certain eras and actors while marginalizing others. By shifting attention toward alternative historical anchors—such as Reconstruction, settler colonial governance, and early equity-focused administration—scholars can begin to disrupt dominant narratives and expand the field's conceptual foundations.

While this study provides important insights into the treatment of the Second Founding in public administration scholarship, it is limited by its focus on a defined set of journals and search terms, which may not capture all relevant scholarship. Our coding and thematic analysis reflect interpretive judgments that, while systematic, cannot fully account for the complexity of

how history is engaged across the broader literature. Future research could expand the scope to include additional publication venues or alternative methodological approaches to further test and refine these findings.

Recognizing the Second Founding as more than a historical episode but as a foundational moment in public administration's development is crucial for advancing social equity. Addressing the *historical amnesia* that has obscured this period requires intentional efforts to reframe how the field teaches, remembers, and legitimates its past. We encourage scholars and practitioners to fill this historical gap and leverage the roots of the Second Founding to inform current policies and practices, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and equitable approach to governance. Recentering this period within the field's historiography not only enriches our understanding of the constitutional and administrative underpinnings of social equity but also equips us with the historical awareness needed to advocate for meaningful change.

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