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### Public Administration and the Search for Meanings of 9/11

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This paper presents, first, a critique of the response of the literature in public administration to the enormous tragedy of 9/11/01. That literature—more accurately, a proxy that was selected for that literature—reflects several flaws. Public administration's focus, the paper suggests, is narrow and rigid, it tends not to generate creative frameworks with which to view a significantly changed policy environment. It continues, instead, to be fascinated with policies as they are handed down and reveals no curiosity about the pressures that shape them. In its response to 9/11, it remains largely concerned with the description of how public agencies reacted to that tragedy and presentation of thoughtful proposals for organizational coordination that might improve performance and produce better results at a lower cost in the future. Second, the paper provides alternative ways of interpreting the tragedy of 9/11. The motivations of terrorists that the dominant view expresses, and public administration literature accepts, may not be definitively known for some time. It is possible that they were neither impressed by American material goods nor its political freedoms, but infuriated by its accumulated record of foreign interventions. The paper identifies the consequences of this and other alternative interpretations for public administration. And, third, the paper reveals that, with the exception of one article, the treatment of civil liberties in recent public administration literature leaves a lot to be desired. It is remarkably abstract and distant, and the minority whose civil liberties were most threatened remains virtually invisible.

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