

## Introduction

When Harold D. Smith headed the US Bureau of the Budget from 1939 to 1946, the media considered him an important news figure. He was on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1943. Seeking to convey to its readers his stature in the war effort, the cover's subtitle explained that "czars may come and czars may go, but he goes on forever."<sup>1</sup> Having the distinction of appearing on the cover of *Time* says much about his importance. But this was hardly a one-off. Smith gave the commencement address in 1941 at his alma mater (Kansas) and his speech was broadcast live on a national radio network.<sup>2</sup> He was occasionally depicted in political cartoons as an important news figure, including the *Washington Star* and the *Chicago Tribune*.<sup>3</sup> In 1943, Walter Lippmann, probably the most influential columnist of his day, came to Smith's office for an off-the-record interview. They talked for an hour.<sup>4</sup> *Life* magazine ran a picture of Smith as a member of FDR's "party" and *Newsweek* profiled him.<sup>5</sup> In 1942, after giving another speech on a national radio network, the periodical *Vital Speeches of the Day* printed the text in its next issue (Smith 1942e). He was a guest on a long-running educational radio series called the *University of Chicago Round Table* (Smith 1941e). His out-of-town speeches were often covered as national news.<sup>6</sup> In 1941, when reporters wrote about FDR's most important and influential advisors, he was routinely included.<sup>7</sup> Four years later, that was still the case. A weekly newsmagazine went so far as to say that, next to the president, Smith was "perhaps the most powerful man in the Government."<sup>8</sup> Another way to measure his importance from the media's point of view is from a recurring feature in the *New York Times* called "The Day in Washington." It summarized key news developments from the capital that were covered in separate articles in that day's paper. From 1939 to 1946, Smith was mentioned in it forty-seven times.<sup>9</sup> The *Washington Post* ran a slightly different directory

of daily news highlights called "The President's Day." Smith appeared in it nineteen times from 1939 to early 1942.<sup>10</sup> Front-page news is another metric of media importance. In 1942, Smith appeared twenty-one times on the front page of the *Washington Star*. He also wrote articles in the mass media, including the *Sunday Magazine* of the *New York Times* (Smith 1946a), a nationally syndicated column for the Sunday newspapers (1942a), and two articles in the monthly *American Magazine* (1945d; 1946b).

Even though Smith was part of FDR's administration, some pro-business voices viewed him positively. The president of the US Chamber of Commerce wrote the foreword to Smith's 1945 book praising him (Smith 1945a, v-vi). A columnist for *Nation's Business* wrote that Smith "is making a big reputation as a competent administrator."<sup>11</sup> In 1943, *Fortune* magazine praised BOB's record of "invaluable service" and recommended strengthening it by expanding its field service and increasing its jurisdiction over the civil service.<sup>12</sup> The Government Spending Committee of the National Association of Manufacturers invited him to speak to a dinner meeting.<sup>13</sup> Smith led a BOB effort to reduce the number of questionnaires that federal agencies sent to businesses. Conservatives routinely praised him for his success at doing so.

Smith's professional colleagues and peers also thought highly of him. In 1939, at the founding meeting of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), he presented a paper at the concurrent annual conference of the American Political Science Association (APSA) (Smith 1939). A year later, ASPA members elected him as the organization's second president, succeeding William Mosher, dean of Syracuse's Maxwell School. After Smith's term ended, some of his successors continued to be major figures in the new profession, including Louis Brownlow, Luther Gulick, and Leonard D. White. Two colleges awarded him honorary doctorates for his professional accomplishments, American University (DC) and Grinnell College (IA). On the 125th anniversary of its founding, Allegheny College (PA) invited him to give a commemorative lecture to its business school (1940a). Smith was also invited to speak to conferences of many professional and practitioner organizations, including a conference of state and local finance officials in the South (1941b), Society for the Advancement of Management (Smith 1944c), Municipal Finance Officers Association (1944d), American Municipal Association (1941f), Council of State Governments (1942b; 1942c; 1947), the American Road Builders Association (1944b), and the National Tax Association. During WWII, the National Municipal League described him as "an outstanding exponent and example of management brains in government."<sup>14</sup>

### Smith's Conception of Budgeting: Apolitical, Non-policymaking, and Anonymous

Smith influenced the cultural norms of the profession of public budgeting. He said that a budget director should be an apolitical expert who served the chief elected executive through neutral competence rather than politics. Other important values he asserted relating to his role included that he was *not* a policy maker, was relatively unimportant regarding non-budgeting issues, and had a low public profile. He repeatedly stated these values through the mass media. *Time* magazine's cover story attributed to him four essential operating principles that contributed to his success. They included that "he must have a 'passion for anonymity'" and "must stick to his administrative duties, leave policy to the politicians."<sup>15</sup> The central focus on a budget director being apolitical was frequently echoed in media coverage of him. For example, in 1941, a popular magazine for women explained that "when the President required a man who was a scientist rather than a politician," he picked Smith.<sup>16</sup> In a front-page profile in early 1943, the *Wall Street Journal* explained, "His engineering background gives him a scientific and non-political outlook on government. And it is in a detached, scientific manner that he tackles problems about him."<sup>17</sup> The same month, a syndicated columnist quoted him as describing BOB's organizational culture as "detached, objective, [and] critical."<sup>18</sup> A few months later, a feature article in the *Saturday Evening Post* described Smith as "the business manager and efficiency expert" for FDR.<sup>19</sup> When Smith announced in mid-1946 that he was stepping down as BOB director, an editorial feature in the *Detroit Free Press* praised his career because he "proved what a non-political expert can do in a non-political office."<sup>20</sup>

Smith also routinely declared that he did not make policy and that he was not important when it came to non-budgeting aspects of the government. After FDR announced his intention to appoint Smith as BOB director in 1939, Smith said in an interview with a national wire service that, like his role as Michigan's state budget director, the federal budget director "does not make policy—and should not be popping off" about it.<sup>21</sup> Four years into the job, he was still saying the same thing. Downplaying his role, in a media interview "he calls his job 'housekeeping,'"<sup>22</sup> The issue came up in several congressional hearings. In 1940, a senator asked him, "Do you consider your organization as a policy-making organization?" Smith replied, "It is not. The Director of the Budget does not make policy. It is up to the President and Congress to make the policy" (US Senate 1940c, 19). A

few years later, he walked it back, but only ever so slightly. He conceded, "We do deal with what I call a minor area, or a secondary area of policy, but we do not originate policy" (US House 1943b, 286).

Incongruously, much of the media coverage of Smith emphasized his dislike of publicity and being a public figure. A 1941 profile said that "Smith has shied from the public spotlight. He has too many secrets to keep to make public appearances."<sup>23</sup> A different profile a few months later declared that "Mr. Smith sincerely prefers the background, and is one of the few officials around Washington who really has a passion for anonymity. In fact, he was in the capital a couple of years before many folks realized how much weight he really carried in the inner circle."<sup>24</sup> The American entrance into WWII did not change those depictions. A business columnist observed that "Smith shies from publicity."<sup>25</sup> A reporter's book about Washington said that Smith "shuns personal publicity" even though he was accessible to reporters (Childs 1942, 85). Another book that year said that Smith was "little known to the public but has tremendous influence as the President's incorruptible right-hand man for purposes of internal administrative coordination" (Kiplinger 1942, 334–35). The next year, during yet another interview with a reporter for a profile, he displayed a sense of humor about the incongruity of it all. "He said the worst thing that ever happened to him was to get trapped into this interview."<sup>26</sup>

### Review of the Literature

Given the central role of BOB in federal operations, Smith occasionally appears in public policy-focused literature in modest and passing roles and usually in neutral and descriptive terms. Examples from the twenty-first century include civil defense (Roberts 2014), arms production (Koistinen 2004), Social Security (Gibson 2003), Japanese internment (J. Smith 2003), and social welfare (Williams and Johnson 2000). Smith also has bit parts in many biographies, such as those of FDR (Daniels 2016; Burns 1956), Harry Hopkins (Sherwood 1950), and Paul McNutt (Kotlowski 2015). As would be expected, Smith is often referred to in the literature relating to operational matters that touched on BOB's portfolio, including reorganization (Arnold 1997; 1998; Pemberton 1979; Polenberg 1979), budgeting (Dame and Martin 2009; Kahn 1997), FDR's managerial style (Wann 1968), and the managerial presidency (Piffner 2020; Grunes 2011).

General textbooks in public administration that had multiple editions document Smith's importance and then his gradual disappearance from contemporary relevance. In the 1948 edition of his textbook, Leonard White (who would have known Smith through ASPA) wrote that "under the leadership of Harold D. Smith, it [BOB] developed into the principal staff agency of the Federal government" (1948, 62), that Smith and the bureau now had "considerable influence" (63), and that Smith's view of the role of BOB was "a radical reorientation" from that of his predecessors (261). In the last edition of his textbook, White mentioned Smith much more briefly but continued praising him for having "transformed the character of the Bureau" (1955, 62). Pfiffner's multi-edition textbook referred to Smith in the second edition (1946, 365n7, 373n4, 379n14).<sup>27</sup> Smith disappeared from later editions. Dimock and Dimock's first edition praised Smith as "a new kind of administrative leader in America." They described him as having "fine human qualities and deep sympathies" and that he "had a distaste for preliminary or unfruitful, controversial conferences and often avoided them, but when he moved, he did it decisively and effectively" (1953, 210). However, he disappeared from later editions. Budgeting textbooks also present a similar arc of Smith's rise and, then, gradual fade out in pedagogy. Burkhead praised "the transformation of the Bureau of the Budget" that Smith engineered (1956, 293). The first three editions of the long-running textbook series *Public Budgeting Systems* cited Smith's role in expanding the concept of budgeting toward program planning (R. Lee and Johnson 1973, 103–04; 1977, 66; 1983, 68). However, the reference was omitted beginning with the fourth edition in 1989. Smith is wholly absent from several other major multi-edition budgeting textbooks, including Lynch (1979; 2017) and Gosling (1992; 2016). On the other hand, a few twenty-first-century budgeting texts approvingly flagged Smith's writings (Willoughby 2014, 1, 20–21; Mitchell and Thurmaier 2017, 196) and a reader for public administration students republished a tribute to his professional contributions (Holzer 2000, chap. 2).

Smith also stood out in writings by public administration and political science faculty. Some praise came from people who worked with him during the war. After the war, when they returned to the academy, they continued to think well of his record. For example, in late 1946, Harris praised Smith in *APSR* for remaking BOB into "one of the most important administrative developments in recent years" (1946, 1140). Gulick (a quasi-academic) began praising Smith even before the war ended. In *APSR*,

he flagged for readers that “the influence of the Director of the Budget was also of great importance.” For example, BOB “made an extraordinary contribution not only in orderly budgeting, but also in management and organization” (1944, 1176). In his Alabama lectures after the war, Gulick praised BOB’s central role when it “brought the facts together, stated the issues and alternatives, and pressed for agreement at the highest levels and for decisions by the President” (1948, 51). He listed BOB as among the five “best organized offices in Washington during the war” (103). Similar assessments came from faculty who weren’t in Smith’s immediate network. Lepawsky wrote that, during the war, “Smith carried a heavy part of the responsibility for integrating the activities of governmental administration and industrial management.” As a result, he was “in a strategic position” to provide useful observations about the real world of public administration (1949, 199).<sup>28</sup> In 1953, Waldo wrote that Smith had “a distinguished career in governmental fiscal affairs” (305). Burns’s biography of FDR’s wartime leadership described Smith’s “gifted leadership” of BOB, making the agency “the President’s biggest single staff resource” (1970, 452).

The modest literature on BOB/OMB as a federal and presidential agency also praises Smith and characterized his directorship as “an exceedingly creditable term of service” (Hobbs 1954, 29). Berman’s history described him as “truly one of the unheralded administrators in the history of American political institutions” (1979, 14). Mosher’s comparative study of OMB and GAO said that “probably the most influential of all budget directors down to 1981 was, and remains, largely unknown outside of the government—Harold D. Smith” (1984, 175n7). In another study of OMB, Tomkin described Smith as BOB’s “visionary” director (1998, 33). Burke’s comprehensive examination of the institutionalized presidency noted that BOB under “Harold Smith, was much more significant than it had been with Smith’s predecessors” (2000, 11). Dickinson and Rudalevige provided a positive and in-depth examination of Smith’s role during FDR’s presidency, concluding that he was “dual-hatted,” in that he developed BOB as a center for neutral competence in public administration, but also that he provided political advice to the president (2007, 19). An overall assessment of OMB noted Smith’s contributions in the areas of management, legislative clearance, and neutral competence (Bose and Rudalevige 2020). Daniels declared that “Smith became the most important single civilian administrator in Washington” (2016, 14). Finally, in observance of the agency’s centennial, Pfiffner emphasized that “Directors Harold Smith and James Webb [Smith’s successor in 1946] led BOB during the 1940s, the only era of the budget

bureau in which the management function was highly valued and powerful” (Pffifner 2020, 14). This string of complimentary observations in the research literature have largely established and maintained Smith’s sterling reputation in budgeting and public administration.

### Rationale and Scope

From the preceding literature review, the plain question is: What did Smith do to earn such praise? He has been depicted as something of a role model and pioneer for the then-rising profession of public administration and, within it, the specialty of government budgeting. Such high standing and reputation is in contrast to the absence of significant research literature examining in detail his actual record and work. There have been no in-depth reviews of Smith’s professional life or biographical accounts.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Smith’s public assertions of his professional values have not been juxtaposed with his actual working record. What came through loud and clear in his normative statements and observations was that, in his view, budgeting was an apolitical expertise, that it did not involve policymaking beyond strictly budgetary considerations, and that it should be a relatively anonymous and behind-the-scenes role. Starkly put, did he practice what he preached? Or was this an artifice of a public persona that hid more than it revealed? A detailed examination of his record and activities as US Budget Director can examine the accuracy of his professed professional principles.

To accomplish these goals, this inquiry is a *de novo* investigation into Smith’s record at FDR’s BOB. These chapters rely largely on bedrock primary sources, such as archival documents, federal publications issued at the time, and other contemporaneous sources. Reliance on secondary sources and post hoc sources was held to a minimum. Original and primary sources of accounts of his work were less colored by hindsight and later perspectives—even if Smith’s papers are somewhat biased because they came from him. An important qualifier about the scope of the book is the focus on Smith’s professional service as FDR’s budgeteer and *de facto* manager-in-chief. It is not a history of BOB from 1939 to 1945, although Smith’s leadership of the agency inevitably includes some aspects of the bureau’s operations. Nor is it a comprehensive history of the major public policy issues of his time, rather only discussing them in the context of his role and involvement. Some of the themes to be explored include what he did and how he did it. One prism entails examining more closely the values he

stated to the media that were central to his approach to budgeting: being nonpolitical, limiting his policy involvement to budgetary issues, and seeking low public visibility. How accurate were these claimed professional values? Another prism is whether he functioned exclusively in a staff role, limited to offering advice to the president, or if he was also the de facto line manager of the entire executive branch who directly supervised all manner of administration, implementation, coordination, and operations.

## Sources and Methodology

### *Harold Smith's Papers*

Franklin Roosevelt hated memos for the file. He liked to do business verbally, in person, and without any formal written record (Breitman and Lichtman 2013, 314). That way, he could change his mind if he wanted to without any documentary proof that he had done so. (Which he often did.) History is lucky that Smith felt compelled to ignore that. After every meeting with the president, Smith would go back to his office and dictate a summary of the meeting, particularly the subjects he brought up and the guidance FDR gave him on how to handle each matter. It was not that Smith was particularly eager to violate Roosevelt's operating etiquette. Rather, for the Bureau of the Budget to be the president's central management agency, Smith's staff of specialists needed to be informed of precisely what Roosevelt's guidance or policy was. After dictating his summary of a meeting, his secretary would cut up the document into the discrete policy decisions FDR had made. Based on the assignments and specialties of each BOB staffer, she sent them a copy of the meeting summary that related to their responsibilities.<sup>30</sup> This was not only more efficient than Smith having to talk to each of them individually, but it gave the staff a more textured understanding of what the president wanted (and did not want). With a written record of Roosevelt's desires, each staffer could not only implement the directive but also, as time passed, be able go back to it when necessary to be sure of what the administration's policy was.

History is the unintended beneficiary of Smith's diligence in constructing BOB to be the president's central management agency. One can track issues rising to the policy or political agenda, how FDR sought to handle each, and how BOB proceeded to implement presidential guidance. Smith's summaries of meetings with FDR are sometimes more than dry policy



history or budgeting information. They also track FDR's ebullience and moods. For example, in early 1941, Smith asked for a brief meeting with the president to finalize some details for a reorganization of the defense production mobilization. When he was finished, he expected to stand up and leave. Instead, Roosevelt was in a talkative mood and recounted a luncheon he had just had with Interior Secretary Ickes about Ickes's desire to move the US Forest Service from USDA to Interior. From there FDR segued to the trees he had planted at Hyde Park and about woodworking. "The President was evidently relaxed and wanted to talk about something unimportant. General Watson [the appointments secretary] came in and said that I had promised not to take more than five minutes of the President's time. The President told Watson that I was not taking the President's time, but he was taking my time."<sup>31</sup> On another occasion, Smith had asked for another short meeting. By coincidence, FDR was about to have his hair cut. Smith recounts, "[The president] suggested that I talk to him while he was getting his hair trimmed. One of the White House colored servants came in with barber's equipment. The President was put on his wheelchair and the hair cutting operation began back of the President's desk in his office, with the rug rolled back." Smith quickly covered the business at hand. "The President chatted along about one thing and another of a current nature, while he was getting his hair cut. . . . The President seemed quite unconscious of the fact that the barber was working on him, as he chatted, but would screw his face to one side as the trimming job went along. When it was over, I bowed out with a goodnight, having spent about 45 minutes of which perhaps less than 15 were needed for the immediate business I had to clear with the President."<sup>32</sup>

Two weeks after Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt invited Smith and assistant director John Blandford to join him for lunch at the White House. They welcomed the opportunity because it meant a relatively solid and uninterrupted hour to talk. They covered nearly a dozen issues, in each case briefing FDR on what each specific issue was and getting his feedback and instructions.<sup>33</sup> In mid-1943, at the end of a long substantive meeting, Smith told FDR that he had bought a farm in rural Virginia and was spending his free time there. FDR promptly told Smith of a food popular in central Europe that came from deer meat. Perhaps it could become popular in the US as well? It was an amusing anecdote and indicated Roosevelt's far-ranging mind and memory. Getting back to his office, Smith commented, "I think the President gets a good deal of relief from these conversational excursions into subjects about which he needs to take no responsibility."<sup>34</sup>

A more somber account came from Smith's first meeting with Roosevelt in 1944. FDR was in bed, seeing few visitors, ostensibly down with the flu. Smith had not seen the president for over a month because he had been away at the Teheran summit meeting with Stalin and Churchill. According to Smith, "[The president] seemed worried and worn out. I have never seen him so listless. He was not his usual acute self." Smith noted that in the past he occasionally had had meetings with the president in his bedroom, "but never so groggy." In fact, in the middle of reading a draft of his annual budget message, it looked like he had nodded off. Either he was just exhausted from the long trip and the flu, "or else that Admiral McIntire had doped him heavily in order to keep him quiet."<sup>35</sup> One FDR biographer cited Smith's account because it so tangibly conveyed Roosevelt's decline (Hamilton 2019, 204). Historians are fortunate that Smith was such a detail-oriented and organized person and willing to disregard FDR's general ban on memos for the record. His papers at the Roosevelt Presidential Library are a fount of information. However, they were not his *office* files. Rather they were limited to four series:

Daily Memoranda (DM): These extend from April 1939 to December 1940. Smith dictated what he did that day. Because these are dictations (and he likely rarely proofed them), they sometimes contain garbled phrases, names, and titles. His daily memorandum for Labor Day in 1939 included in the middle of the text a notation "(End of cylinder)." Clearly, he was speaking into a Dictaphone that day. However, it is possible that due to the holiday, no secretarial staff were present to take his routine dictation and therefore, as an exception, he used the Dictaphone that day.<sup>36</sup>

Conferences with President (CwP): These summaries cover Smith's entire BOB service from 1939 to 1946. Immediately after meeting with President Roosevelt (or Truman), Smith usually dictated what they had covered and what directives the president had given him.<sup>37</sup> Smith sometimes brought with him to these White House meetings BOB's assistant director (Blanchard, Coy, Appleby). On those occasions, the assistant director often dictated the meeting summary.<sup>38</sup> Occasionally, Smith did not dictate a summary of a meeting. For the busy year of 1941, his secretary kept a separate record of "Conferences with the President—Not Dictated."<sup>39</sup> Her list covers twenty-six meetings. In some cases, her summary of the subject of the meeting (if she knew) indicated that it was relatively minor and brief. For example, on January 9, 1941, Smith took some letters of appointment to the White House for the president to sign.

White House Memoranda (WHM): This series covers Smith's entire BOB service, 1939–1946. These are memos submitted by Smith to the

president between meetings or as follow-ups to meetings. The collection appears to be incomplete, largely consisting of substantive and informative documents, rather than cover memos to paperwork for the president to sign. These memos rarely have a subject line in their titles and therefore can only be identified by date.

Daily Record (DR): These records extend from spring 1940 through 1946. These are Smith's office calendars maintained by his secretaries, usually Miss Marie Johnston. In many cases, they are little more than post hoc listings of his appointments and phone calls that day. His secretaries rarely sat in on his meetings and did not routinely listen in on his phone calls. This is clear because they sometimes marked items with a question mark when they were not sure precisely what the subject of the meeting or call was, how to spell the person's name, or what the person's link to Smith was. She often could figure out what the subject of the call was, although sometimes she guessed, either by noting what they "probably" talked about or placing "(?)" after listing the likely topic. Smith's practice was in contradistinction to Treasury Secretary Morgenthau's standard operating procedure. He had a stenographer sit in on all the meetings he hosted and listen to his calls in order to create a verbatim record of each. Amusingly, during Smith's first few months as BOB director, Morgenthau's secretary was not sure what his full name was. She identified him as "Donald C. Smith."<sup>40</sup>

While not consistent, some entries in the daily record are quite detailed, probably if he asked that she sit in to hear his side of a phone conversation and then to type up what he said. In a phone call from John Blandford, Smith's former assistant director who was then head of the federal housing agency, Johnston quoted Smith telling Blandford "to keep his shirt on," that is, to calm down.<sup>41</sup> On rarer occasions he asked her to listen in on the conversation and then to prepare a detailed summary of it, particularly what the other person said and what they agreed to do (or not do).<sup>42</sup> Less frequently, she inserted her own characterizations of the comings and goings. For example, she described a BOB official who "sauntered in for a moment, then sauntered out."<sup>43</sup> On another occasion, when Wayne Coy arrived for a meeting with Smith, Smith was still on the phone. Coy "entered and waited on the side lines."<sup>44</sup> When a senator called Smith to inquire into the status of a decision about an airline matter, Smith frankly replied that so many people were involved in this issue that "God alone knew what the answer would be." According to Johnston, "That satisfied the Senator. He seems to have trust in Him."<sup>45</sup>

Even though voluminous and detailed, the archival collection of Smith's papers nonetheless needs to be treated with care. Their strengths are that

they were dictated, summarized, or drafted shortly after the events they narrated, sometimes the same day. They were fresh and nearly instantaneous records. They reflected how things looked at the time. The weakness of Smith's records is that the narrator presented his version of what happened. Therefore, he was likely to put himself in the best possible light rather than using a confessional perspective or depictions of his actions negatively or critically. The exception to this general caution about his papers is the daily record. He did not author it and probably did not see what Johnston listed. As a result, the information in them was the least likely to be skewed from a personal perspective, although Johnston appeared to be utterly loyal and dedicated to him. Nonetheless, even with that caveat, her lists of phone calls made and received, visitors, and meetings were all factually based in an elementary sense, in that they truly occurred and that the subject matter was usually based on her own direct knowledge.

The National Archives II site in College Park (MD) is the depository for agency files. Some records from BOB are included in Record Group (RG) 51, of the Office of Management and Budget. Within it was a small collection of Smith's office files (OFHDS), evidently mostly from his later years there. Nonetheless, they were somewhat helpful in rounding out material omitted from his papers at the FDR Library. Smith had only given two historical interviews before he died in early 1947. Robert Sherwood interviewed Smith for his book on Roosevelt and Hopkins (1950, 72). Sherwood deposited his research records for the book at Harvard's archive. Similarly, Herman Somers interviewed Smith for his book on the Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion (OWMR) (1969, 67n34). He later donated his research notes for the book to Yale's archive. Oddly and sadly, both collections are missing those interviews.<sup>46</sup> Finally, Smith was surprisingly prolific. Excluding media coverage, he created a relatively large corpus of published matter reflecting his views. For his BOB years, there are about thirty items, such as speeches, addresses, articles, and radio appearances (see bibliography). In addition, he testified dozens of times at congressional public hearings. Those meetings usually included his prepared statements, reports he submitted during or after the hearing, as well as his answers to questions.

### *Historical Research Methodology: Triangulation*

For this de novo inquiry into Smith's BOB record, the focus must be on primary sources and minimal use of secondary sources. A key benefit of using original sources is that they are based on what was known at the time and

are not distorted by hindsight or later developments. These sources provide a sense of history *in the present tense*, as it unfolded, without any foreknowledge of what would eventually happen. As a kind of raw history, this conveys how things looked and felt at the time. It is history in slow motion. In particular, there are two seemingly inexorable tendencies facing historians that need to be consciously prevented. First, historiography needs to avoid imposing a sense of inevitability or “rightness” to the eventual outcomes. Foner’s history of the three post–Civil War constitutional amendments on slavery emphasized the distortions of hindsight. “In retrospect the abolition of slavery seems inevitable, a preordained result of the evolution of American society.” Rather, “like all great historical transformations, it was a process, not a single event. It played out over time, arose from many causes, and was the work of many individuals” (2019, 21). Second, history needs to avoid smoothing out the jagged edges of events and contradictory developments. In explaining his approach, a biographer of Gandhi emphasized a conscious effort to “reconstruct these arguments as they unfolded at the time, regardless of how they have subsequently been interpreted, projected, or (as is sadly often the case) distorted” (Guha 2018, xiii). Two twenty-first-century histories of the WWII era provide good models for re-presenting familiar history by recapturing this kind of “in-the-moment” perspective. In his history of Great Britain’s prewar appeasement policy, Bouverie sought to “write a narrative history which captured the uncertainty, drama, and dilemmas of the period” (2019, xii). Similarly, Lelyveld’s recounting of FDR’s last year cautioned that “because we read history backward, we know the answer” (2016, 11). That can lead to a kind of backfilling approach, which is heavily biased due to such foreknowledge.

For a historical research methodology, the triangulation research approach is particularly apt (McNabb 2018, 46, 379, 417–18; 2021, 280, 366; Eller, Gerber, and Robinson 2013, 354). The goal is to identify primary materials that are wholly independent of the other two. With them, a historian is able to reconstruct a chronology of events, sometimes day-by-day, even hour-by-hour. One source might confirm what was presented in another, might fill-in lacunae of the other sources, and might even contradict the other sources. In this way, historical triangulation can recreate a rich and textured narrative of developments and events (Lee 2019c). For this study, the three sources for the triangulation methodology were archival materials, contemporaneously published official government documents, and journalism.

First, archival sources included Smith’s papers (discussed earlier). Diaries and office files of other major participants were also helpful, but only if

authentically contemporaneous. These included the diary of Interior Secretary Harold Ickes and the transcripts of Treasury Secretary Morgenthau's staff meetings and phone calls. The publication of post hoc and edited diaries or memoirs are suspect. Second, official government documents, such as reports, formal messages from the president to Congress, congressional committee reports and hearings, proclamations, statutes, and the like, all are accurate of what they purport to be. As print materials, they cannot be amended after release or publication. Like archival documents, they are the raw stuff of history. In particular, the US federal government has often been described as the largest publisher in the world, with a flood of materials issued by the Government Printing Office (GPO). Third, self-evidently, journalism is a mediated recounting of events by observers. Nonetheless, it represents how things looked at that time to the reporter. Newspaper coverage conveys that moment. The reporter did not know how things would turn out or what eventually ended up being important or minor. Excepting (unleaked) activities behind closed doors, media coverage indicated the media's sense of importance, however flawed.

### Structure of the Book: Chronology of Smith's Public Service Career

A chronological structure is very helpful in trying to reconstruct events as they unfolded and based on how they looked at that moment, without the omniscient tinting of retrospective hindsight. The first two chapters cover his initial year as BOB director, beginning with his focus on reorganization in spring and summer of 1939, then pivoting to preparing the president's FY 1941 budget during the last quarter of 1939. Given that this pair of chapters examine his first-time experiences with these responsibilities, they are necessarily quite detailed in order to convey what the job of BOB director entailed. The subsequent chapters are by calendar year. They similarly present in-depth examinations of Smith's activities and views, in particular in the context of rapidly changing circumstances, political or otherwise. In rough chronological order, these included the initial war events in Europe and Asia (1939–1940), FDR's declaration of a limited state of emergency (1939), his gradual mobilization of armament production and military preparedness (1940), the presidential election (1940), his declaration of an unlimited state of emergency (1941), Pearl Harbor (1941), each of the war years (1942–1944), another presidential election (1944), and FDR's brief fourth term (1945).

The focus of each chapter is on relatively new activities or issues that call for significant detail and discussion. These chapters seek to avoid unnecessary repetition of subjects discussed in detail in preceding chapters or routine activities of BOB. However, Smith had four recurring annual events: preparation of the budget for the next fiscal year, drafting the president's budget message, participating in the budget briefing for the White House press corps (FDR called it a "seminar"), and congressional appropriations hearings for the president's proposed budget for BOB itself. Even though they occurred on a permanent and fixed cycle every year, they were often quite different and distinctive from previous cycles, usually due to external events and developments. Therefore, every chapter will discuss them but with particular focus on what differentiated them from the preceding year. The concluding chapter identifies some of the recurring themes of Smith's career as FDR's budgeteer. In particular, it suggests that Smith may deserve the moniker of having been Roosevelt's *other* assistant president.