

and facilitating executive management. Historically, the former role took precedence over the latter.¹²⁶ The commission was characterized by an insular professionalism and a police-like reputation for pursuing merit system abuses.¹²⁷ As the 1970s progressed, however, dissatisfaction with the federal bureaucracy was growing. Public sentiment held that government workers were underworked, overpaid, and unresponsive.¹²⁸ A 1978 Roper Poll reported that only 18 percent of the public believed the civil service attracted the best possible people and less than 10 percent thought it was free of corruption.¹²⁹ The press retold stories of the twenty-one months it took one federal manager to fire a clerk-typist that was late for work every day or how one manager had to completely reorganize an entire division to get around one incompetent manager.¹³⁰ Several states initiated civil service reforms to increase bureaucratic responsiveness.¹³¹

During his 1976 campaign for the presidency, Jimmy Carter campaigned against the bureaucracy and pledged to reform and reorganize the civil service.¹³² He followed up on this pledge when he proposed a major personnel system overhaul in his 1978 State of the Union Address.¹³³ Carter's efforts resulted in the passage of the Civil Service Reform Act (CSRA) of 1978. The act reorganized the CSC into the Office of Personnel Management and the Merit Systems Protection Board. The former assumed the bulk of CSC's staff, its physical plant, and its personnel-management functions. The latter assumed CSC appellate functions and was charged with conducting studies of the merit system. The act also created the Senior Executive Service, the Office of Special Counsel, and the Federal Labor Relations Authority.¹³⁴ The change from the CSC to the OPM was by all accounts intended to strengthen presidential and executive management of personnel.¹³⁵ This shift, however, did not end the OPM's role as one of the merit system's key defenders in government. The OPM partly determines which positions can be filled by appointment, and it audits and monitors other federal agencies to ensure compliance with civil service rules. Fundamentally, its job is to ensure the health of the federal civil service through activities intended to improve the recruitment, retention, and performance of federal employees.

Carter's change toward more executive control was not popular with career professionals in the CSC. Many careerists within CSC worried the new OPM would not aggressively protect the merit system, were alienated by the rhetoric accompanying the change, and resented the increase in political appointees caused by the reorganization. One careerist from the period explained, "When OPM was first established, some CSC people draped their offices in black believing that the political presence at OPM would serve to undermine the effort to assure adherence to the civil service merit system."¹³⁶ The reorganization came not long after CSC had