
Justice for All: Promoting Social Equity in Public Administration

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At the turn of the millennium, the National Academy of Public Administration found that, although social equity had been the law of the land for some thirty-five years, the profession of public administration still did not have a good handle on its implementation. This led to the creation of the academy's Standing Panel on Social Equity, whose more than 250 practitioners and scholars have been seeking to make social equity real at last as a pillar of public administration. The panel's work informs this volume, which the editors introduce and then present in three parts, "Context and Background," "Measuring Social Equity," and "Leadership, Outreach, and Organizational Development."

In the first chapter of "Context and Background," the editors review social equity in American society, noting that historically there has been more emphasis on liberty than on equality; "equal protection" was only explicitly added to the Constitution in the Fourteenth Amendment. While they conclude with a more inclusive definition of social eq-

uity, they begin with the economically measurable "relatively homogeneous distribution of income that is produced in modern societies by the policies that redistribute resources from the wealthy to the poor in economies that provide compensation in a relatively uniform way" (p. 12). Yet, the United States ranks 94 of 138 countries and is less equal than all European countries (as well as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) (p. 12), and this steadily increased over those thirty-five years. The editors cite institutional as well as cultural explanations for the international discrepancies. Countries with parliamentary systems and proportional representation are much more inclined to adopt redistributive policies, as are those with less ethnic diversity. Then, too, while other people recognize structural reasons for unemployment, Americans (at least three of five) believe that the poor are just lazy and not taking advantage of all the opportunities out there.

In Chapter 2, Sallyanne Payton offers a trenchant analysis of America's

history of inequity. Slavery was not the problem, it was "black people," she rightly contends. For when slavery ended, policymakers did everything they could to keep blacks from attaining independence, property ownership, and education. Like segregation elsewhere, zoning kept black professionals confined to black neighborhoods, so that there was little chance of a significant black middle class emerging. But even when African Americans were able to prosper in their own communities, if they did too well that incited resentment within the surrounding white community; this led to such excesses as the murderous 1921 destruction of "Black Wall Street" in Tulsa, as Barbara Robles aptly recounts in Chapter 3.

The "othering" of people—whether by ethnicity, religion, or gender—is, alas, universal, as Terry Buss and Usama Ahmed next show in looking at social equity in developing countries. Othering reduces social capital and thus also reduces economic growth. Insofar as administrators acquiesce to such policies, they fail in their fiduciary duty to the community. The United States, for example, permits too much urban inequality, as Edward Glaeser, Matthew Resseger, and Kristina Tobio document in Chapter 5. They note that urban inequality is less a matter of low income levels—important as those are—than of the number of very rich Americans. Trying to solve the inequality problem by redistribution at the city or even the metropolitan-area level, they contend, will backfire because the wealthy will move out of the given jurisdiction's reach. Glaeser, Resseger, and Tobio have read Tiebout (1956) but not Orfield (1997), who demonstrated that tax-base sharing can enhance equity across a metropolitan area (at least in a low-diversity state like Minnesota). But their recommendation to invest in increasing high school graduation rates,

instead of worrying about college, is dead on.

Moving to the workplace, Samuel L. Myers Jr. says that, after equal opportunity and affirmative action, today it is diversity—inclusiveness on efficiency grounds. Businesses claim they want a workforce that reflects their consumer base, Myers observes, citing a study which concluded that students exposed to higher degrees of ethnic diversity showed more active thinking, as well as growth in intellectual engagement and motivation. On the other hand, there is much research that documents an inverse relationship between diversity and social capital—which is to say, there is substantially less social capital in Texas than in Minnesota. More research is needed.

Part II, "Measuring Social Equity," begins with Richard Hug's examination of the all-too-neglected social determinants of health. Of these, the single most salient one is residential segregation: Living in a poor neighborhood guarantees less access to education, hence employment, making it only half as likely for the residents to get patient-centered care. As former surgeon general David Satcher and his colleagues found in 2000, there is a huge age-specific mortality discrepancy—1,472 blacks die for every 1,000 whites. This and many other accounts make it palpable that, to adapt a familiar phrase, simply "living while black" is fatally stressful in a segregated society.

James Brunet points out in Chapter 8 that "driving while black" makes blacks three times as likely as whites to be physically searched or have their vehicle searched during a traffic stop. Worse yet, young black males were seven times more likely to be imprisoned in 2004 than whites. Imprisonment is more likely because of less education, as Leanna Stiefel, Amy Ellen Schwartz, and Ingrid Gould Ellen attest in Chapter

9. Blacks' lower test scores are directly related to lower income. Since there is not much that can be done in the schools, they rightly recommend preschool and even infant-parent education. The same neighborhood theme is sounded in Chapter 10, "Environmental Justice and Land Use Planning," where Sylvester Murray and Mark Hertgo document once again that "race was the most significant factor nationwide in the siting of hazardous waste facilities" (p. 194).

Part III, "Leadership, Outreach, and Organizational Development," begins with a chapter by Kristen Norman-Major and Blue Wooldridge on "reframing the debate" by making the economic case for social equity, since what is socially equitable is often economically efficient. Children who get a poor education, they note, will have lower earnings and poorer health, a cost estimated at \$500 billion a year in lost goods and services. Economists who know the educational findings cited above have calculated that a return on investment of 9 percent to 17 percent could be obtained by investing in early childhood development.

In Chapter 12 Susan Gooden documents the necessity of assessing agency performance. In the Wisconsin Works program, blacks were sanctioned at twice the rate of whites, which led to scrutiny by the American Civil Liberties Union and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Gooden's point is that agencies should be willing to scrutinize themselves; this one was, atypically, willing to take that on and was successful because the leadership was behind it and those doing it were respected. In the next chapter, Gooden and Wooldridge urge that social equity be integrated into core human resources management courses. It certainly has a special place in human resources because of its "front and center" role in equal employment opportunity and

affirmative action, but, they argue, it should permeate the whole curriculum. Texts do not discuss sufficiently why, in practice, pretty much the same people keep getting hired. Employers see doing more as a luxury.

In the final chapter, the editors sum up the preceding discussions and then recommend "Steps to Take." They emphasize here that public administrators should speak truth to power and provide moral leadership; work to mitigate unfair policy consequences and make sure goods and services are consistently provided; ensure equal access and opportunity, treatment and protection, and due process; make sure things are appropriately analyzed and appropriately measured; make sure that all people are represented; and build partnerships with other organizations and the community.

In connection with the last step, too many still assume that lower-income or minority people cannot speak for themselves. If we are going to have real democracy, though, we are going to have to credit people with greater competence (this is the "agency" as opposed to "charity" approach that Buss and Ahmed stressed above). To "enact" social equity, we must, first, treat all individuals the same, while understanding that group differences are important to how well individuals do in society. Additionally, we should promote more active participation and self-determination. Just disseminating information is not enough; to be able to communicate with all, we need competence in the cultures of others.

Justice for All does not provide much that is new or surprising, but it does a good job on the historical background of persisting inequity and how that racist heritage affects the contemporary context. More important, it shows us that we can indeed measure inequities and, therefore, find ways to diminish them (what gets measured gets done, as they

rightly repeat). Finally, it exemplifies what can, in fact, be done in practice and that everyone can benefit, economically and socially, if equity is enhanced.

How is this about "ethics"? Ethics is not just about not using a public agency's equipment and employees for private benefit. Ethics, in the greater Aristotelian sense, is for a person to "flourish" in life, to be able to engage in "the pursuit of happiness" that Jefferson declared all Americans have an "equal right" to. Since recent research has documented that there is a direct correlation between happiness and ethical behavior, it is all the more the responsibility of government officials in a democracy to ensure that all individuals can flourish equally. This is done by "promoting social equity," as the subtitle here has it, and it should be done in an active way that empowers all individuals to full agency. As this book shows, we are clearly not

up to such lofty labors every day, but to do public administration at all, one has to persist with optimism.

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