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Achieving Social Equity: From Problems to Solutions by Mary E. Guy and Sean A. McCandless

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The recent publication of *Achieving Social Equity: From Problems to Solutions*, edited by Mary E. Guy and Sean A. McCandless (2020), sparks a move forward in the literature about social equity. To date, much of the literature on social equity has focused on its overall importance (see, Frederickson, 2010), as well as the conditions of inequality within the discipline (see, Bodkin & Fleming, 2019; Thomas, 2019) and within practice (see, Blessett et al., 2019). Despite the attention that has been given to social equity, the National Academy of Public Administration recently included the need to foster social equity as one of the grand challenges for public administration (Gerton & Mitchell, 2019), suggesting it may be time to move the research on social equity into a new era. Guy and McCandless do just that. Rather than discussing the presence of social equity issues with public organizations, the text seeks to advance our understanding by connecting the literature on social equity with the practicality of the situations that administrators face. This is accomplished over a masterfully curated set of 13 chapters, each which focuses on a unique, but vital perspective on social equity.

Guy and McCandless open the book with an introductory chapter that lays out the imperativeness for including social equity in public administration actions. This includes a discussion of the different definitions of social equity that have emerged in the field and how they relate to each other. By winding in discussions of Plato, Locke, and the progressive movement, among others, they introduce a simple perspective of social equity that is both understandable and relatable. Social equity, they argue, is about fairness and equality for all. The challenge for public administration is how to incorporate this perspective into action, particularly given that the use of the politics-administration dichotomy within the field has created a perspective that administrators should take a value-free approach in their actions. No decision made by a public administrator is without some degree of an equity concern, and the key to successfully addressing these concerns is by providing resources and training to administrators that provide a real-world perspective of the issues that arise and how they can be addressed.

To meet the challenge they have set out for themselves, Guy and McCandless structure the remainder of the book into two broad sections: 'Social Equity and Demographics' and

‘Achieving Social Equity in Policy Domains and Administrative Structures.’ The first section is comprised of four chapters, each skillfully crafted by its authors, that address the demographic components that frequently relate to social inequities. These are gender, sexual identity, race, and the intersection of identities. These four chapters provide a foundational understanding of the equity issues that may emerge in a public organization and how our understanding of these issues has progressed over time. For example, in chapter 2, ‘Gender Equity in the Workforce,’ Sebawit G. Bishu introduces readers to civil rights as they pertain to women. Civil rights are then connected to the integration of women into the workplace and the types of inequities that have since emerged. Where the utility of the chapter hits its stride is in the discussion of the structural drivers that cause gender inequality and its social and organizational costs. This approach is carried forward through the remaining chapters of the section so that the reader can understand what the problem is, what is causing it, and how it can be addressed.

The seven chapters of the second section, ‘Achieving Social Equity in Policy Domains and Administrative Structures,’ carry the problem/cause/solution approach to the next step by applying it to a set of issues currently facing society in the United States. These issues are homelessness, policing, transit, child welfare, immigration, the environment, and rulemaking. Each of the chapters approaches their respective topics by introducing the policy issue and then connecting its emergence with the equity concerns that have arisen as a result. Much like the chapters from the first section, the chapters here then connect the issue with strategies to foster a more equitable outcome. A great example of this is chapter 8, ‘How Transit Matters for Social Equity.’ Written by Samantha June Larson, readers are introduced to the emergence of public transportation in the United States. Readers are not only reminded of equity concerns about historical segregation on public transportation, but they are also introduced to problems of modern day segregation based on access to transit systems and the effect public transportation has played on gentrification. The challenge of managing a public transit system is nothing new; however, the connection between that system and concerns of social equity is something that few are likely to have considered. Thankfully, the chapter reiterates the value of the book by discussing how transit policy can be discussed and implemented along equitable grounds.

Achieving Social Equity provides everything you need to develop a fundamental understanding of social equity and the equity problems that we face in the United States. As has been hinted at above, the real value of the book to the field is in connecting that foundational knowledge with real, practical advice on how to address the challenges. For faculty and students of public administration, the text provides some much needed real world context and solutions. Training our students to become effective administrators requires more than providing a theoretical understanding of the issue, rather students need to be taught how to connect that theory to the practical. In the realm of social equity, this text does just that. To aid in its use in an MPA classroom, each chapter begins with a note from the editors that helps to connect the chapters across the book’s central theme, and they end with a set of discussion questions that help students better engage the material.

By structuring the book in a way that is not only solution-oriented but is engaging and accessible, the book may also be of interest to practitioners. Although the challenge to public administration is to improve equity within public organizations, no organization is without at least some issue that can stand to be improved upon. As administrators make policy recommendations and begin implementation, *Achieving Social Equity* is an invaluable companion on what to consider and how to overcome the problems inherent in the system. In conclusion, Guy and McCandless have done what few others have done before. They have provided us with a book that is a ‘must read’ for anyone working with or doing research on public organizations.

Disclosure Statement

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest that relate to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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