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The topic of diversity in public administration tends to be approached as a necessary response to change. Much of the literature focuses on the need for the creation of diverse organizations in order to respond to changes in the demographic characteristics of the U.S. population in general (Pitts & Wise, 2010) and to changes in the makeup of the workforce through the inclusion of women and minorities as well as the effects of aging baby boomers (Selden & Selden, 2001), changes in attitudes toward affirmative action (Selden, 2006), and changes in the cultural and ethnic identification of people using public services. Organizations have dealt with the impact of these changes through implementation of a variety of diversity programs and policies (Pitts, 2009). Change is a good reason to pay attention to diversity issues, but it does not tell the entire story. The second edition of Mitchell Rice’s edited work, *Diversity and Public Administration: Theory, Issues, and Perspectives*, expands the diversity discussion to include issues of culture, social equity, administrative neutrality, and organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Rather than simply making a case for diversity based on population changes, Rice and his contributors explore the meaning of diversity management and cultural competence in the public sector, critique the status quo, and offer ideas and rationales for diversity on the basis of equity in order to improve organizational decision making, performance, and efficiency.

**Summary of Contents**

The first chapter, “The Multiple Dimensions of Diversity and Culture,” by Harvey White and Mitchell Rice, serves as an introduction and rationale for the rest of the book. This chapter identifies demographic changes as a significant challenge to public sector organizations, not only in managing an increasingly diverse workforce but also in providing public services to a diverse population. White and Rice point out that diversity in the workforce includes traditional
ideas of diversity such as race, age, and gender but must also consider other issues such as socioeconomic status and cultural differences. In Chapter 2, “Diversity Ideology in the United States,” David Embrick and Rice take a historical look at diversity and how it has been implemented in public and private organizations over the past 40 years. This chapter provides a useful, concise history of employment policies such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, affirmative action, equal opportunity employment, multiculturalism, and diversity. Embrick and Rice contend that while the term diversity has seen increased attention in organizations, a broadening of the definition of the term that includes “just about everything but the kitchen sink” (p. 25) has allowed organizations to ignore traditional gender and racial inequalities in the workplace.

Chapter 3, “Managing Diversity in Communities, Workplaces, and Society” by Brenda Marina, moves beyond diversity theory to strategic diversity management, a methodology organizations can adopt in order to “enhance decision-making about diversity” (p. 45). Marina defines several types of diversity and argues that organizations that actively manage diversity issues can create better organizational effectiveness and efficiency. In addition, Marina asserts that simply hiring a diverse workforce is not enough; diversity tends to create conflicts and tension, and in order for organizations to capitalize on the benefits of a diverse workforce, those conflicts must be actively managed in a culturally sensitive manner. Rajade Berry-James continues the diversity management theme in Chapter 4, “Managing Diversity: Moving Beyond Organizational Conflict,” by concentrating on race and gender. Berry-James recounts the history and articulates policy differences between affirmative action and equal opportunity employment. She then places these two policies in contrast with court cases concerning diversity issues in the higher education admissions process. Berry-James asserts that affirmative action, equal opportunity employment policies, and diversity policies have recently come under fire because of differing commitments to the value of social equity. Using the idea that different values tend to create conflict in diverse situations, she suggests a management approach that encourages “employee disclosure of perceptions regarding diversity” (p. 75) and creates procedures for problem solving by a diverse group of employees. Chapter 5, “Institutional Racism, Diversity and Public Administration” by Mario Rivera and James Ward, continues this focus on race and defines different types of institutional racism in the public sector and in public affairs graduate programs. Institutional racism is defined as “practices that directly or indirectly restrict the professional access and mobility of individuals or groups on the basis of race” (p. 82). Rivera and Ward point out that institutional racism often goes undetected because the practices are simply an expression of the status quo. Using public affairs graduate education programs as an example, Rivera and Ward provide specific institutional practices that may be considered legitimate but actually reduce the recruitment and upward mobility of minority faculty members. For example,
hiring practices that give preference to graduates from the top-ranked public administration programs lead to a less diverse faculty, whereas widening the net to include less elite institutions will improve the chances of recruiting qualified minority faculty members. Institutional devaluation of research in areas such as diversity or gender studies is another example of practices that can hinder minority faculty members’ careers. These examples support the authors’ conclusion that simply managing individual attitudes and actions toward diversity is not enough; it must be addressed at an institutional level to identify and modify practices that unwittingly exclude or marginalize minority applicants and faculty members.

Chapter 6, “Workforce Diversity in Business and Governmental Organizations” by Rice, serves as a conclusion of the workforce diversity theme addressed in the first five chapters. This chapter describes several diversity initiatives at the federal level, such as the U.S. Office of Personnel Management’s guide, Building and Maintaining a Diverse, High Quality Workforce: A Guide for Federal Agencies. Rice provides bulleted lists of best practices and questions aimed at discovering organizational attitudes toward diversity that can be applied in public organizations. This chapter is helpful for readers wondering how to assess the diversity of their organization and how to pursue organizational diversity goals.

In Chapter 7, “Teaching Public Administration Education in the Postmodern Era,” Rice expands the discussion of diversity from race and gender to social class and social equity and advocates using public administration education as a tool for increasing social equity through changes in the status quo. He argues that public administration education programs tend to emphasize a traditional Weberian model of bureaucracy that is not amenable to “innovation and change” (p. 125), rather than emphasizing social equity, innovation, responsibility, and performance. Rice identifies three issues for teaching diversity that include recognizing the importance of social class as a variable in people’s lives, including social equity as a legitimate topic of study, and creating a diverse student population. In Chapter 8, “The Challenge of Balancing Organizational Expectations Revisited,” Mylon Winn and Leslie Taylor-Grover distinguish between managing diversity and valuing diversity. Valuing diversity entails seeing differences as a source of value and, in turn, changing the organizational culture through interactions with those differences. This can be seen as a bottom-up strategy compared to the top-down strategy of managing diversity. Managing diversity emphasizes changing the organizational culture first, through policies and procedures. As Rice does in Chapter 7, Winn and Taylor-Grover emphasize the challenge of social equity in the delivery of services by administrators and call on the ASPA Code of Ethics to be updated to include adherence to values of diversity and social equity.

Chapter 9, “Networking, Career Management, and Diversity in the Public Sector” by Wilbur Rich, changes the perspective from the organization to the individual. This chapter makes a case for the minority administrator to create a national presence for him or herself by attending and presenting at national confer-
ences. Rich argues that the creation of social capital through networking at national conferences is important, especially for minority administrators, in order to improve mobility, create and maintain a professional reputation, and build a career.

The next three chapters focus on cultural competency. In Chapter 10, “Cultural Competency and the Practice of Public Administration,” Margo Bailey investigates the idea of representative bureaucracy and argues that representative bureaucracy consists of a continuum ranging from equal opportunity employment to affirmative action to managing diversity and finally to cultural competency. Bailey outlines a framework where the implementation of the first three parts of the continuum can lead to cultural competency in the organization. In Chapter 11, “Cultural Competency, Public Administration, and Public Service Delivery in an Era of Diversity,” Rice takes traditional administrative neutrality to task by arguing that cultural competency is considered illegitimate because it is, by definition, not neutral. This serves as a barrier to the creation of cultural competency and thus effective delivery of services. Rice provides several definitions of cultural competency, a framework of the culturally competent organization, and an example of an assessment of cultural competency in public agencies. In Chapter 12, “Diversity Management and Cultural Competency,” Audrey Mathews uses results of Rice’s cultural competency assessment to identify the cultural competency in public organizations in Inland Empire, California. Mathews concludes that cultural competency is not valued in the public organizations surveyed. In Chapter 13, “Cultural Diversity and Productivity,” Mathews makes a case for workforce planning that includes diversity concerns in order to improve organizational effectiveness and efficiency. This planning should be strategic, comprehensive, and implemented “from the top down and from the bottom up” (p. 293). Finally, in Chapter 14, “Embracing Workplace Diversity in Public Organizations,” Rice and White reiterate the importance of workplace diversity and the need for comprehensive change to achieve it through “changes in communication, leadership, power arrangements, structure, values and related behaviors” (p. 303).

Strengths and Weaknesses

This book offers a fairly comprehensive overview of diversity issues in the public sector through the use of different perspectives and theoretical lenses. It provides good historical information about the evolution of diversity policy in the United States and provides thoughtful discussion about why some of those diversity policies, such as affirmative action, have been coming under fire in recent years. Throughout the chapters, a variety of theoretical constructs are summarized, giving a high-level overview of research in the field over the past several decades. Many definitions of diversity are provided, leading to differing explanations, rationales, and outcomes of diversity in public organizations. Because each chapter is written from or for a different perspective, it is sometimes difficult to
discern the audience for the book. However, each chapter ends with a set of discussion questions, which suggests that it is meant for a classroom setting. These questions as well as the variety of topics and theories provide the framework for creating meaningful discussions about diversity with public administration students that go beyond a simple admonition that diversity should be valued and cultivated in organizations.

The book also points out important challenges to diversity that are easily overlooked by members of public organizations who are used to traditional bureaucracy and administrative values of neutrality and efficiency. *Diversity and Public Administration* makes a case for promoting social equity and cultural competence as important factors in diversity and service delivery. According to Rice, social equity and cultural competency do not require administrative neutrality; in fact, they require the exact opposite. Instead of treating all people the same way, differences in culture and the promotion of equity must be important considerations. In turn, service delivery will become more effective because individual needs will be taken into account. This may be a controversial topic among public administrators, but it should certainly foster discussion. A case also is made for the idea that even though affirmative action and equal opportunity employment have increased the number of minorities and women in the public sector workforce, simply having a more diverse workforce is not the end of discrimination and does not erase barriers to employment and upward mobility.

While the book uses ideas of social equity and cultural competency as a way to improve the effectiveness of public services, it gives short shrift to aspects of diversity that are not race based. Mention is made of gender, age, sexual orientation, and social class in the first chapter, but with very few exceptions, race is the main category of diversity discussed. The near exclusion of other categories of diversity and their subsequent exploration is frustrating and puzzling. Some important ideas needed more nuanced discussion. For example, considering administrative values of neutrality and cultural competence as described earlier, perhaps the issue is not a conflict between two mutually exclusive values, but that public administration programs and services are not neutral and instead promote values of the mainstream culture. In Chapter 11 Rice alludes to this paradox, but it warrants more explanation. Some other questions would have been useful to address. For example, in the chapters discussing cultural competency, it would be helpful to explore how people can become culturally competent while avoiding stereotyping or racial profiling. Or, when considering the assertion that diversity improves organizational decision making, addressing the question of how to balance the differences in ideas and opinions with the conflicts those differences create would be helpful.

Finally, while it is difficult to create consistency in an edited volume, this book could have used a little more cohesiveness. The chapter about networking seems a bit out of place; it focuses on the individual while most of the book
discusses organizational and institutional issues. The chapters on cultural competency seem especially haphazard. Rather than building on each other as in the beginning of the book, these chapters tend to reiterate information. For example, Chapter 12 includes a word-for-word recounting of two numbered lists outlining elements of culturally competent organizations and a continuum of the cultural competency development process that appear earlier in Chapters 10 and 11 respectively. In general, a good deal of information is repeated, especially in the recounting of the history of affirmative action and in certain definitions and rationales of diversity.

It is important to note that this is not a handbook for implementing diversity practices. Because it offers very few how-tos, readers looking for detailed, pragmatic advice will be disappointed. However, readers interested in diversity theory will be rewarded with a good overview as well as ample references for those motivated to embark on further theoretical research. It can be assumed that for many readers, this book will not be the end of the journey into diversity theory but instead will serve as the map for more detailed exploration.

References


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