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Editor's Introduction

A Call for Racial Justice and Improving Equity in Policing, Education, and Childcare

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This Spring 2022 edition of the Journal of Public Management and Social Policy contains a four-part symposium titled: “Scholar Strike for Racial Justice: Call to Action for Public Administration;” five research articles; and a book review.

Calls for racial justice have been heard loud and clear in the twenty first century and universities have been called into the fray to respond to the message. As dedicated public administration scholars, we are undoubtedly at the forefront and leading the charge to bring about positive changes in the social justice and racial equity universe. This symposium seeks to bring not only awareness to racial justice, but to bring attention to research that focuses on racial justice in public administration. To that end, four manuscripts were selected for inclusion in the symposium.

The first manuscript, by Wright, Dolamore and Berry-James is titled, “What the Hell is Wrong with America? The Truth about Racism and Justice for All.” In this article, the authors examine five policy domains (policing, education, health, housing and elections) with the intention of highlighting pervasive racial inequities as well as policy solutions to address each of them. Their model is grounded in research by Gooden (2014) and Sheppard et al. (1992) where they develop a policy domain based on “claiming, blaming and naming” stakeholders for inequities and injustices in our society.

The first area discussed is policing. After defining all of the requisite terms such as institutional racism, the authors cite a plethora of research and data that show disparities in every stage of the criminal justice system beginning with law enforcement, to the court system, to the correctional system. More specifically, their summary research show that African Americans are not only overly represented in each of these stages, but that the courts tend to be more rigid and liberal in their sentencing options when an African American is on the stand. They follow this examination with an equally provocative examination of education disparities. They argue that minority students are: marginalized; experience micro-aggressions at higher levels than other students; experience the ill effects of school closing at higher levels; experience cultural imperialism; exploited by the educational system thereby increasing the school-to-prison pipeline; and suffer violence at higher levels than non-black students.

Housing is the third area that they examine. The authors provide summary research highlighting racist and discriminatory practices such as redlining and housing segregation. The impact of such policies impact home ownership, homelessness and other ill effects on the minority population. Their analysis of health provides an equally compelling case that black citizens are over represented in the prevalence of any number of diseases and other sicknesses, and are less likely to have health insurance which further exacerbates the problem. They argue that these inequities are clearly connected to social inequities and social determinants of health. Despite a plethora of research highlighting a lack of cultural competence and health reforms that are designed to facilitate racial equity in the health care sphere, policy makers continue to rest on their laurels and use a “band aid” approach to solving the problem.

The authors close out their analysis by highlighting changes to state laws that disenfranchise black and minority voters. These new laws essentially reduce the impact of progressive laws such as expanded voting periods, increased methods of voting, and so on. They end their article by calling upon the federal government to be more proactive in changing the narrative and reducing institutional racism.

The next article in the symposium is by Emas, Hatch, Bharath, and Gaynor, titled “Strategies for Introspection and Instruction towards Anti-racism in Public Management and Administration.” Using research grounded in critical race theory, black feminism, intersectionality, and public service pedagogy, they discuss the actions that educators need to embark upon prior to instructing students in anti-racist behaviors. As one of the pillars of public administration, they argue that faculty and the students that we teach must be competent in the tenets of equity, equality and social justice. These three items are not only embedded in what we do, but they have essentially become a key objective of public administration and stand alone as a pillar in our profession.

In so doing, they posit that educators must recognize the need to understand their identity, the identity of their students, and the benefits associated with those identities. They must learn and acknowledge the intersection of government policy and its impact on various populations. They have to acknowledge who has shaped our field and how that research impacts what is taught in the classroom. They argue that the role of educators is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research using a variety of pedagogies and a variety of scholars that could reshape our understanding and subsequently our field of study. One of the main goals of an educator is to provide a solid background that students can use to see the world for what it is and to change the narrative. That is, there are clearly policies and social structures that have negative effects on black and other vulnerable populations. These conversations are never easy, but the reality is quite real for those that are negatively impacted. As the number of courses that offer alternative ideas and theories increase, the likelihood that the discipline will move in a difference direction increases.

The next article in the symposium is by Wilson, Dantzler, and Rivera, titled, “Managed Racial Capitalism: Understanding the Bureaucratic State’s Racialized Practices in Detroit, Michigan.” The authors address two questions in their research. First, how does the public administration of local governments reproduce inequality? Second, how can we rethink public administration through a system of governing that intentionally engages with and rectifies racialized practices?

In their analysis, they examine the city of Detroit, Michigan, a city that had a large black population and once stood as a glowing example of “black freedom and vision.” Due to economic shortfalls, the city could not meet its financial obligations in 2013 and eventually filed for bankruptcy. This had a pivotal impact on the lives of black and brown residents in

the city. In describing the eventuality of Detroit, the authors use a neoliberalism approach. Neoliberalism is defined as “a set of economic, social, and political principles put in place to allow the market to occupy a critical part of the governance institution (see Harvey, 2005; Dumenil, and Levy, 2011). Furthermore, it is a set of governmental policies and ideologies driven by the market to promote individualism (Marx et al. 1964).” They argue that “neoliberalism is a guiding framework that enables the structures and practices of racism to be institutionalized through public service” (p.63). Finally, they argue, “as a field of practice, public administration must contend with ways of adopting a managerial pedagogy that exploits the power of marginally situated people.”

The final article in the symposium is by Negron, Vinzant, Butz, and Savattaro, titled “Changing the Social Equity Language Game in Public Administration: An Ethical Perspective.” In their article, they examine language games to explore racial equity through a public administration ethical lens. In short, they argue that language games in public administration can be used to enhance or diminish social and racial equity through an exploration of four issues areas: economic development and infrastructure, artificial intelligence, public health and social welfare. They conclude that in order for social and racial equity to become viable, “there needs to be an examination and ultimate reconstruction of the underlying language games hindering ethics of equity for public administration”. Additionally, they argue that there is a “white-leaning language game” that facilitates positive outcomes for some while reducing opportunities for others. As public administrators it is incumbent upon us to identify such language in our research at the micro, meso, and macro levels.

The first non-symposium contribution in this issue is titled, “Impact of Stand Your Ground, Background Checks, and Conceal and Carry Laws on Homicide Rates in the U.S.” In this article, Chakraborty, Menifield, and Daw use data collected for the period 199-2015 to assess if changes in handgun laws affect homicide rates in U.S. states. Using a Bayesian Change Point model and regression analysis, they find that changes in handgun laws do in fact impact homicide rates. Specifically, they find that states that passed facilitative laws were more likely to see an increase in homicide rates and states that passed restrictive laws were more likely to see a decrease in homicide rates.

“Race and the Rush to Reopen Schools During COVID-19,” is the next article by Farris and Mohamed. In their article, they examine how “racism and COVID-19 are associated with racial and ethnic differences in attitudes about school reopening plans during the summer of 2020”. Using data from the Democracy Fund and the Nationscape survey, they find that people of color were less likely to support plans to reopen schools, as they felt that school districts were not prepared to successfully implement the needed protocols to ensure the safety of their children. Their views were exacerbated by the racial injustices that clearly highlight structural racism exists in many forms and the threats to minority communities is manifested on many fronts.

Using state-level panel data, Samudra examines the role of “second order devolution” in state TANF patterns in her article titled, “State TANF Spending: Does Devolution Matter?” More specifically, she examines three pivotal questions: How are states spending Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds on various activities that satisfy the goals of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA)?; What factors affect a state's TANF spending on various activities that satisfy the goals of PRWORA?; and, Do Second-Order Devolution (SOD) states spend TANF funds differently than non-SOD states? Using 20 years of state level panel data from 1998-2018, she finds that

African American and Hispanic caseload affects cash spending negatively, but work spending positively. African American caseloads are treated differently between states and within states and could lead to lower spending. She also finds that SOD states spend more funds on cash support, work support, and family formation when compared to non-SOD states. SOD states also have a higher percentage of African American and Hispanic TANF caseloads and slightly higher cash benefits compared to non-SOD states. In summary, she argues that race is the key factor in TANF spending and states should be diligent in examining the data prior to making policy decisions on spending for SNAP and Medicaid.

Brian Robinson has the next article in this issue titled, ““Why Do I Have to Send My Child There?” How Low-Income and Working-Class Black Mothers Perceive School Choice in Washington, D.C.” In this article, the author determines how low-income and working-class parents perceive school choice and what motivates their perceptions. Using interview data from black mothers in Washington D.C, he finds mothers’ view school choice as the opportunity to facilitate their child’s educational opportunities. However, their decisions were limited due to a finite number of opportunities. The author recommends that school choice advocates reconsider the marketing and language used in perpetuating school choice programs, as it is not clear what “choice” actually means. Second, policy makers should reexamine the selection process for schools to improve the likelihood that low-income students can attend more desirable schools. Third, policy makers should examine the data which highlight the inequities that create conditions that result in low-income and working-class families seeking other educational options. Finally, the author argues that policy makers should examine housing policies that prevent vulnerable populations from accessing neighborhoods that are in-boundary for better schools.

The final article is by Carroll, titled, “Mirrored Windows Theory and the NYPD: Does Heavy Surveillance Policing Translate into Greater Use of Force?” Carroll’s research emanates from Broken Windows Theory which argues that a broken window will lead to more severe crimes. Hence, it suggests that law enforcement officers have to “manage” smaller crimes in order to prevent more significant crimes. Rather than relying on this theory, she coins the phrase “Mirrored Windows Theory”, which reverses the context and applies it to police officers to examine “whether greater prevalence of heavy surveillance policing, which often creates disorder within neighborhoods and among their residents, leads to greater use of force by police officers.” Using data from the New York City police department, she assesses three hypotheses that consider stop-and-frisk and citizen complaints on the use of physical force by police officers.

She finds that a greater number of stop-and-frisk incidents that do not involve physical force is positively correlated with the frequency of actual use of force by police officer. Contrary to her hypothesis, she also finds that an increase in the number of civilian complaints within a neighborhood where police officers are exonerated from misconduct is not positively correlated with the frequency of actual use of physical force by officers in that neighborhood. Finally, she did not find support for her third hypotheses that a greater number of civilian complaints within a neighborhood made against police officers alleging inappropriate use of force will be positively correlated with the frequency of actual use of physical force by police officers in that neighborhood.

The final contribution to this issue is a book review by Theodore Johnson. He reviewed, “From Equity Talk to Equity Walk: Expanding Practitioner Knowledge for Racial Justice in Higher Education.” Johnson argues that the book is an excellent contribution to the field as it highlights and underscores the notion that higher education faculty and administrators should lead the charge in educating students on social and racial equity as well

as actively seeking mechanisms to change policies to reduce the trends. He argues that the text provides the reader a play book, if you will, to arm themselves with techniques to reduce racial inequities and to proactively thwart inequities.

Finally, this is the last edition of the journal under my editorship. It has been a pleasure to serve as editor for a journal that is dedicated to research that impacts vulnerable populations. I wish Dr. Andrew Ewoh and his team much success as he takes the rein as Editor in Chief for the second time.

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