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# Human Rights Theory as a Means for Incorporating Social Equity into the Public Administration Curriculum

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## ABSTRACT

Advancing social equity is, or should be, a primary focus of public administrators. Yet it is not an integral part of the curriculum of public administration programs, nor is it a prominent feature of the NASPAA standards. Almost 40 years ago, the Minnowbrook I scholars proposed an activist role for public administrators in achieving social equity, which came to be known as the New Public Administration (NPA). Despite the efforts of George Frederickson and others at that conference, the NPA has progressed slowly and haltingly. Through advocating privatization and market models, the NPA—such as it is today—has come to substantially deemphasize the significance of social equity.

How can social equity be made a central part of the public administration curriculum? What is needed, in our view, is a theoretical base that goes beyond Rawls' Theory of Justice or Kant's Deontology. Philosophy alone cannot provide the tools that public administrators need for this task, nor is it sufficient to examine social equity simply within the confines of a given level of government policymaking, whether it concerns local or national policy. Public policy decisions today have global implications, and social equity must take an international perspective as well. This article proposes that a complex of research and advocacy literatures that we will characterize as *human rights theory* offers a unique opportunity to the public affairs curriculum by providing a basis for education in social equity, incorporating a global perspective and coherent ethical decision-making models.

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A full appreciation of the contribution that human rights can make to public administration must be set against a basic understanding of human rights, their basic value in the context of public administration, and proposals for change that depart from more traditional approaches to decision making. Consequently, through a brief overview of human rights theory, we will argue that placing so-

cial equity principles in the context of human rights can open the door to broader considerations of ethical reasoning that will ultimately contribute significantly to our understanding of the role of social equity in public administration and public policy.

Our focus will be on incorporating human rights theory into ethics courses; however, we believe that social equity, like ethics, should be integrated into all core courses in the public administration curriculum. Wouldn't budgets be improved if social equity were as part of their theoretical base? If they were based on social equity, programs implemented to address issues such as economic development, environmental protection, global warming, and trade policy, at every level of government, would enrich society. A recognition of the fundamentals of human rights would enable more comprehensive policy making for such problems as health care, transportation, and housing. Certainly, international policymaking would become more true to our American principles.

When human rights theory is included in the public affairs curriculum, it is generally placed in courses or programs in international politics and development. We argue that human rights should be examined in domestic policy making as well. This article will discuss the meaning of human rights in the global and domestic agendas and its potential to improve domestic policy as well as international relations through equivalent administrative decision-making models across borders.

Masters' programs in public administration and policy tend to be skill-oriented, for some very good and valid reasons. The field of public administration is so broad that it can hardly be grasped in two or three years of full-time graduate work. In addition, new and complex technologies place untold demands on professional skill development. These rigid confines of professional efficiency and effectiveness, however, beg the question "Is the public administrator merely a cruncher of numbers, an instrument of law and policy, or a good recordkeeper? Or is she or he, in fact, a fully rational being who will have to act upon broad guidelines to produce not just outcomes but outcomes with substantive meaning?"

The changing face of elected governments and the fluidity of politics raise important challenges for public administrators. They have to be responsive and permeable to change, but they must also ensure continuity and stability to vast constituencies that have grown accustomed to business as usual and who are, in most cases, not very receptive to change. Concurrently, even small shifts in bureaucratic procedures can at times represent dramatic events for particular individuals. These two stressors—one that calls for rapid response to continuously changing environments and another that favors stable and consistent government action—can have disorienting effects on the public administrator. The resulting frustration can and likely will negatively affect performance and may cause agency stagnation, trigger poor delivery of outputs, and create pockets of disillusion-

ment that will alter or possibly stop short the synergy of mechanisms required for the fulfillment of the administrator's mission.

The above realities are, of course, topics vastly covered in graduate programs.

Organizational theory demonstrates some of these dynamics over time. Micro and macro economic principles coupled with case studies and accessorized by skillful manipulation of available resources, with the study of budgets as an important component, help to navigate financial understanding. Policy studies and analysis trace government behavior back to its roots and predict with reasonable accuracy the future of policy. But all these productive, skill-building courses fail to develop a philosophy of the administrator's role in the larger scale of the lives of the citizens they purport to serve.

The human rights perspective lends informed authority to the establishment of policies while prescribing public service values that are disengaged from conflicts of interest that arise from the "basic principles of the particular polity involved" (Cooper, 132). Because human rights are, for the most part, a response to the wishes of democratic citizenries, they avoid the dangers of insular, inward-looking, regional values, which are often the epicenter of social conflict. They also ground the claims made by proponents of social equity as a legitimate process of change in administrative behavior over time.

#### OVERVIEW OF HUMAN RIGHTS THEORY

It is, perhaps, not very difficult to make the case that human rights are the historical progenitors of social equity—both theories are in need of a theoretical linkage, where the first is a natural portal for the latter. The great divide between East and West in the tense days of the Cold War, between civil and political rights (West) and economic, social, and cultural rights (East) animated the period when social equity was in its infancy.

The search for a grand theory of human rights, which continues to occupy the minds of some of the most influential intellectuals of this period, is ongoing. Perhaps the most cogent effort in this field, and the one from which programs in public administration can draw and upon which the future of social equity theory can be grounded, has been developed by Amartya Sen (2004). Sen first proposes that "proclamations of human rights are to be seen as articulations of ethical demands" (318). He then explains that, like other ethical claims that demand acceptance, there is

an implicit presumption in making pronouncements on human rights that the underlying ethical claims will survive open and informed scrutiny. Indeed, the invoking of such an interactive process of critical scrutiny, open to information (including that about other societies) as well as to arguments coming from far as well as near, is a central feature of the theory of human rights. (318)

Sen warns about some of the problems that permeate the basic assumptions of utilitarian ethics, stating that

the utilitarian calculus can suffer from valuational distortions resulting from the neglect of substantive deprivation of those who are chronically disadvantaged but who learn, by force of circumstances, to take pleasure in small mercies and get reconciled to cutting down their desires to “realistic proportions” (thereby appearing to be not particularly deprived in the special metric of pleasures or desire-fulfillment). (220)

The above concern was a major obstacle of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, repeatedly echoed by Malcolm X (1990) and Fannie Lou Hamer (1990), who consistently asserted that they were not just looking for civil and political rights, but for human rights that can be claimed by any human being (see, for instance, “The Black Revolution,” 1964; “The Ballot or the Bullet,” 1964; “With Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer,” 1964; and “Prospects for Freedom,” 1965).

Amartya Sen (2004) affirms that human rights “must be institutionalized” (328) and concludes with the remark that “the elements of a theory of human rights...[see] them as pronouncements in social ethics, sustainable by public reasoning” (331).

Michael Keeley (1987), in “Freedom in Organizations,” defines human rights as they are to be understood in the context of this paper: “The most plausible human rights are rights that virtually any human beings would claim for themselves, regardless of their personal tastes and motives. Very specific rights are more apt to meet this requirement than the grand, abstract rights of classical formulas (260).” For the study of public administration, however, Keeley’s conclusion is a sobering warning that formal theories of efficiency still dominate much of the field:

But what is dead, or dying, is mere ritualism: trust in ceremonial procedures and magic word of consent, which mask vested interests and favor parties with the most legal cunning (or the wealth to hire it). Although our courts and legislatures may still make plenty of errors and allow a lot of injustices, they are less likely now to mistake behavioral displays of agreement for truly voluntary acts. I think there is a lesson here for us all.

For students of organization, the moral is that positivist aversion to value-laden concepts like human rights is misguided. Unless we consciously choose our own values—in this case, rights that organizations must respect to remain voluntary—we may wind up

unconsciously accepting the values of someone else, likely one in a dominant position. The empiricist route, as followed by nineteenth-century jurists and many modern social scientists, has a way of turning seekers of truth into servants of power. (262)

Two explanatory statements must anticipate any discussion of human rights in public administration. First, the discussion of rights is not an exclusive domain of policy and lawmakers. U.S. government agencies have ample discretion (Howard, 1994) to navigate the world of rights and administration. In a near-anecdotal style, Howard (1994) narrates the reach of U.S. administration. Second, human rights are not meant to be applied to an abstract, nonexistent international community (Ignatieff, 2005). They reach everyone's doorstep, whether it is a remote rural community or a large city. Many U.S. cities, under the guise of revitalization, have initiated a process of gentrification, whereby the poor and working poor are being chased out of urban centers through economic coercion. Among the victims, minorities represent the overwhelming majority. This phenomenon is not the result of the exclusive action of policy and lawmakers. It requires the cooperation—indeed, the commitment—of government administrators. Nearly 40 years ago, social equity proponents provided an ethical foundation to resist such disparities in the administrative process. They understood their period but also understood that change was inevitable lest we continue to perpetuate an environment of administrative strife and inequality.

The great prosperity of the post-World War II period brought about some unintended consequences, particularly on the part of those who were not included in such prosperity. The 1950s and 1960s were a period of great social agitation. Roosevelt's New Deal and the defeat of German Nazism, Italian fascism, and Japanese imperialism had brought about, it seemed, a renewed hope for a more humane future. Husband and wife Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt personally committed themselves to the creation of the United Nations and the drafting of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Ignatieff, 2005; Schlesinger, 2003; Glendon, 2001). In 1944, addressing the Democratic Convention, Franklin Roosevelt called for a second bill of rights: an economic bill of rights, which should include the right to work for a living wage, to food, to shelter, to education, to recreation, to a decent living, and to protections against old age, sickness, accident, unemployment, and unfair competition in business (Ignatieff, 2005, 18, 91). To secure these rights for all, Roosevelt stated, was the obligation of Congress.

After the 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (347 U.S. 483, 74 S. Ct. 686, 98 L. Ed. 873), the activity of the courts, too, was critical in influencing and even ordering a review of ethical and moral standards of government action. But the scope of Supreme Court decisions was two-sided: the courts were decidedly revisiting the Bill of Rights and considering matters of equal protec-

tion, due process, and civil and political rights, in general; but they also were slowly deferring discretion to administrative agencies out of concern for efficient government operation. The ever-expanding administrative state was kept in check for its violations of civil and political rights; it was burdened with further bureaucratic proceedings and exhaustive documentation of the reasonableness of administrative action; but it also left ample room to navigate the world of regulation with minimal interference and a concern for getting things done. In this context, addressing human rights and social equity concerns would have generated, if considered in the implementation processes, a major shift in the positivist paradigms.

In 1962, Milton Friedman published a searing critique of government regulation and advocated for a return to the precepts of classical liberalism and of *laissez-faire* economy. Although Friedman's critique was ignored at the time of its first publication, it had a remarkable effect on the policies of future administrations. Friedman (2002) was following Hayek's (1944) previously published work, but he failed to recognize Hayek's cautious approach to administration and the multiple inconsistencies found throughout Hayek's defense of the free-market system. As Hayek pointed out, "in no system that could be rationally defended would the state just do nothing" (1994, 45). And later on, in what appears to be a full examination of his conscience, he says

[t]here is no reason why in a society which has reached the general level of wealth which ours has attained, the first kind of security [against physical privation and minimum sustenance] should not be guaranteed to all without endangering general freedom.... An incautious handling of these questions might well cause serious and perhaps even dangerous political problems; but there can be no doubt that some minimum of food, shelter, and clothing, sufficient to preserve health and the capacity to work, can be assured to everybody.... There is no incompatibility in principle between the state's providing greater security in this way and the preservation of individual freedom. (133–134)

While criticizing the welfare state, Hayek was also, paradoxically, making the case for the welfare state, including a defense of social insurance programs that would be extended to health and other unanticipated social problems.

Human rights theory coupled with social equity theory can be a fresh approach to public administration research. Human rights are part of "a quality of mind that will help [individuals] to use information and to develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and of what may be happening within themselves" (Mill, 2000a, 5). Although Rohr's (1989) constitutional origins of public values are still held high in the context of con-

temporary administration, other public administration scientists are searching for new answers, particularly in the area of comparative or developmental administration. For this new field of research, the human rights perspective can be a healthy addition to the already voluminous body of work developed in the last decade. The concern for international values is gaining increased importance. It is no longer sufficient, it seems, to talk of an "American administration," perhaps isolated from the rest of the world. Rohr's (1989) bounded constitutionality may be proven inadequate to deal with issues of globalization. Furthermore, the Preambles to the U.S. Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, along with Article 2, Section 2, §2 of the U.S. Constitution, make the argument for "constitutional boundaries" (Rohr, 1989) far less limited than may first appear. The establishment of justice and the promotion of the general welfare in the Preamble, the pursuit of happiness in the Declaration, and the ability to make Treaties in Article 2 expand the perceived boundaries of the Constitutional text and make the advocacy of social equity and human rights not only fair game but also a mandate.

In summing up the findings of a Symposium on Globalization and International Approaches to Public Affairs Education in the *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, Ed Jennings and Harvey White (2005) stated that "the same forces of globalization that are breaking market barriers, increasing international cooperation, raising international tensions, and bringing people around the globe in close contact with each other are shaping public affairs education in ways seen and unseen" (69). Amid a long roster of unresolved issues and questions, three of their concerns are particularly relevant. They ask, "To what extent, if any, is there an emerging international consensus on mission and core curriculum components?" "What innovative approaches offer promise in addressing issues of globalization?" "How do politics and culture affect pedagogy?" (71).

Although the purpose of this paper is to provoke a discussion around such issues, Jennings and White's questions could be enriched by further considerations, for what "affects pedagogy" is not limited to "politics and culture" but also encompasses civil, economic, and social variables. The main question, however, is raised by Jennings and White in the preceding lines of the article: "Can we prepare students to be policy analysts, city managers, agency heads in state and local government, directors of non-profit organizations, or other participants in public affairs without attending to the international environment or international practices in our programs?" (70–71).

It is a fact that the world of economics has forced the hand of national governments toward globalization of politics and that few places on earth, if any, are insulated from it. This may compel public administrators to elaborate a human rights value-based framework for public administration that will mainstream social equity and anticipate the future of research. In this effort, they can be aided by the existence of a large body of literature on human rights, which is at



an advanced stage of development, has been agreed upon by the vast majority of the world's nations, and is embodied in the several instruments that comprise Human Rights. The conclusions reached in the final drafts of those instruments are the product of the work of thousands of scholars, activists, heads of state, politicians, intellectuals, and millions of other people worldwide and, although perhaps imperfect, those contributions cannot be easily dismissed or ignored. The world of human rights represents, as far as global human understanding has been able to evolve, the most advanced system of principles to adequately inform decision-making.

Arguing that elected governments cannot sustain the stability of a democracy without lifting social and economic rights, and, I would add, cultural rights, to the same level as civil and political rights, Zehra Arat (2003) effectively creates a link between politics and administration. She states that the "responsiveness and effectiveness of governments can reinforce or weaken the legitimacy of political systems," defining responsiveness as "governmental action [that] addresses the public demand" and effectiveness as governmental action that "accomplishes its specific desired end." She goes on to conclude that "lack of responsiveness and effectiveness weakens the authority of the state and, as a result, the legitimacy of the regime" (6). This is a crucial point in public affairs and administration, one that rests at the very core of administrative purpose. But the link to human rights—the underlying philosophy or principle—is articulated by Arat (2003) in the following terms: "A modern democracy, then, to sustain its legitimacy, should pursue policies that respect and protect the civil and political rights of its citizens and provide effective responses to their social and economic needs. A balance in the government's performance in these two areas is crucial to the destiny of democratic political systems (6)." While Arat speaks to the larger theme of human rights, few public administration and policy scholars would disagree.

The nonpartisan character of human rights and social equity makes them especially attractive for institutions that do not wish to teach advocacy or otherwise do not want to convey an image of partisanship, cultural selectivity, or relativism, bias, or prejudice. All the while, the adoption of a human rights framework in public administration and policy programs would advance the goals of uniformity in the United States and around the world, as Arat (2003) properly points out, and would provide an important rational basis for the adoption of social equity.

#### HUMAN RIGHTS IN ETHICS COURSES

Because the study of ethics—that is, the determination of what is right or wrong—is often reduced to codes of conduct, and because moral values are inherently biased toward particular sets of values and depend greatly on individual judgment, it seems logical that administrators should seek more or less stable principles to guide their actions. Such principles are incorporated into several sets of human rights instruments, which the United States has helped to write, has

signed, and/or has ratified. Moreover, such instruments transcend the realm of insular politics and policy; they are equally valued by most of the global community and provide a near-perfect blueprint for reasoned and universally accepted decision-making.

The concern for universal principles that can guide ethical decision-making are not new and lie at the heart of much of the ongoing dialogue about the study of ethics in public administration programs. McCollough (1991) frames this problem when he states that “the aim of the major Western ethicists has been to discern and state rational principles on which all persons of goodwill and sound reason could agree” and that “this led ethicists to search for foundational principles that would transcend the relative historical particularities of the ethicist’s situation and constitute unchanging norms of universal validity” (7). Frederickson (2005), one of the architects of social equity, adds that “[t]he practices of politics and administration without principles can be evil” (176). Human rights instruments contain most if not all of those principles that ethicists have been searching for, and social equity scholars certainly understood their relevance by pushing forward a theory that would neutralize some of those evils.

Cooper (1998) warns that

conflicts of responsibility that people experience within public organizations should not be resolved in an idiosyncratic fashion. If public administrators are to be responsive to the wishes of a democratic citizenry, their general course of conduct toward serving the public interest must be guided by established policies and these policies should enforce and reinforce prescribed public-service values. That is, they should support the basic principles of the particular polity involved and oppose the tendencies of individuals and organizations to become self-serving. (131–132)

A viable and unified theory of ethical decision-making is debated in most modern textbooks on ethics and public administration. Terry L. Cooper’s *The Responsible Administrator* (1998) does not purport to “develop a substantive ethic for public administrators” (xxii), for

normative ethics for public administration are to be found in the ethical tradition of citizenship as it has evolved throughout U.S. history. This tradition has at its core a notion of the common good, the importance of democratic participation of the citizenry, and the ultimate sovereignty of the people. (xxii)

Dean Geuras and Charles Garofalo (2002) believe that

there are universal values and principles that govern ethics in all areas. These values and principles include respect for other people, human equality, honesty, and fairness. (xii)

To arrive at such universal principles, they propose a system of unified ethics that draws from several theories and traditions, each of them generating a particular set of questions that can instruct decision-making. In the teleological tradition, questions arise regarding consequences, long-term effects, and the promotion of greatest happiness. In the deontological tradition, there is a concern for the universal principle and its consistency in all cases, the treatment of people as ends in themselves, as well as the promotion of “the ideal of a society of free, responsible people whose ends promote each other rather than conflict with each other” (61). In the intuitionist tradition, actions are preceded by an examination of one’s conscience and a perceived feeling about them. And, finally, in virtue theory, concerns must be raised about the character traits of an action, their reflection on self and on the character of others, as well as their representation in others that one may admire (Geuras and Garofalo, 2002, 60–63).

Thomas E. McCollough’s *The Moral Imagination and Public Life, Raising the Ethical Question* (1991) pursues a path of personal ethics. As he explains, “to undertake ethical analysis is to engage in a critique of culture. . . . In seeking to ask the right questions, we may find some clues in posing the ethical question as: *What is my personal relation to what I know?*” (28, emphasis in original).

In posing this question, McCollough concludes that “what I know of the twentieth century holds me hostage. I am personally responsible for the human future” (149). This is the general feeling, with a humanistic touch, pronounced by Jean-Paul Sartre (1994): “man is nothing else but what he makes of himself” (15).

With a foreword by John A. Rohr (1993), George Frederickson’s *Ethics and Public Administration* (1993) presents another set of 13 essays authored by 20 social researchers that go beyond the normative-philosophical approaches to ethics. Frederickson explains that

philosophy, norms, and theory are the guides for both the structure and the actions of government. If research on ethics does not inform larger issues of philosophy or theory, then that research is beside the point. But if field-based research on ethics in the management of government affairs tests the validity of theoretical or philosophical claims, then it can significantly inform the practices of government. (9)

In another of his books, *The Spirit of Public Administration* (1997), Frederickson advocates ample discretion for public administrators, but develops proper norms

and ethics to support such discretion. Such norms are framed by principles of social equity and go beyond the “standards that govern public administration—neutrality, efficiency, and economy” (111).

Michael Ignatieff (2005) has compiled a series of essays that could well be the starting point for an ethics course with a new dimension. In *American Exceptionalism and Human Rights*, Ignatieff explains,

As a language of moral claims, human rights has gone global by going local, by establishing its universal appeal in local languages of dignity and freedom. As international human rights has developed and come of age, not much attention has been paid to this process of vernacularization. We must ask whether any of us would care much about rights if they were articulated only in universalist documents like the Universal Declaration, and whether, in fact, our attachment to these universals depends critically on our prior attachment to rights that are national, rooted in the traditions of a flag, a constitution, a set of founders, and a set of national narratives, religious and secular, that give point and meaning to rights. We need to think through the relation between national rights traditions and international standards, to see that these are not in the antithetical relation we suppose. American attachment to its own values is the condition and possibility of its attachment to the universal, and it is only as the universal receives a national expression that it catches the heart and the conviction of citizens. (25–26)

Waldo (1948) prescribed a very different role for administrative theory, essentially affirming that administrative theory was political theory. In fact, administrative theory was not only political theory, but it was the most important form of political theory, for it “specified the commitments we are willing to make in the conduct of public affairs in an organizational society” (Denhardt, 40). Although Simon’s core concerns were centered on efficiency and rationality, Waldo dismissed efficiency as a value, because efficiency was limited by the purpose it served.

In 1989, John Rohr narrowed the scope of ethics in public administration to regime values that were to be found in the U.S. Constitution—a more focused elaboration of his earlier work, which had posited a reference to scholarly interpretations of American history—and identified such values as freedom, equality, and property (Cooper, 1998, 175).

If democracy lives in the world of political science, the delivery systems of politically adopted rights fall squarely on the shoulders of public administration. The responsiveness and effectiveness of governments is achieved through its delivery systems. Therefore, at the heart of this delivery system there must

exist a strong commitment to those principles that not only ensure the success of programs but also grant stability to the system. Thorough knowledge of these principles and inclusion of them in normative approaches to public administration and policy are essential to the formulation of good policy and sensible decision-making, which in turn will reinforce the fabric of social relationships and provide for the survival of all of the world's communities. The United States as a nation has agreed to uphold these principles, which have survived domestic and international inquiry and scrutiny. The United States should, therefore, diffuse such principles throughout the government's delivery systems. It is not necessary for administrators to become the advocates of their constituencies (Frederickson, 2005). They must simply act, as professionals and as citizens, in a spirit of respect for those universal principles to which not one but several U.S. governments of different ideologies and compositions, through time, have sworn allegiance in the presence and company of the international community. The passion for advocacy can be replaced by the pursuit and implementation of political engagements with the international community, in domestic as well as in international affairs.

Accordingly, graduate programs in public affairs and administration would be in good—and nearly universal—company if they were to adopt foundational principles for decision-making based on defined and universally accepted principles of human rights theory, with social equity at the forefront as a strong and valid introduction to this effort.

The United States was relieved of the burden of proving that it is a morally superior society after the fall of the totalitarian regime in the former Soviet Union. However, in order to maintain its economic hegemony, the United States frequently ignores human rights abuses on the soil of several of its trading partners—China and Saudi Arabia, to name a couple among many others. It is also true that the United States often turns an equally blind eye to those human rights abuses that occur within its own geographical boundaries (for example, the racist character of its criminal justice system, which fills jails and prisons almost entirely with members of minorities, while the government continues to deprive those communities of funding for education, adequate shelter, employment opportunities, and other essential infrastructure). This quasi-indifference toward a human rights agenda at the government level has enormous implications for its administrative body, despite efforts, particularly at the academic level, to reverse this trend, against which social equity scholars seem to have expended the greatest efforts.

The consequences of such government policies are quite disturbing. First, they severely impair the ability of future administrators to carry out their duties as public managers. Second, they leave future administrators less prepared to exercise caution when handling policy demands in the face of multi-cultural, multi-racial, and multi-ethnic constituencies. And, third, they abort what was once the American vision of championing human rights at home, while promoting and

participating in the writing and adoption of international human rights instruments with its United Nations partners.

The primary duties of public administrators are to carry out and materialize public policy. They are the supply side of legislative authority. Ironically, however, at both state and local levels, they deal primarily with those matters that are extraneous to the political process, or what Madison called “the ordinary course of affairs.” They are also less exposed to the civil and political relationship between the people and government. But they are an important buffer between the civil and the political, and often the most important advising body in economic, social, and cultural debates. They deal with such fundamental issues as housing permits, permits for demonstrations, safety and security, economic life, subsidies for cultural activities and programs, and for a myriad of not-for-profit organizations. They ensure the right to free speech, to free exercise of religion, to activities that are tangential but not particularly integrants of civil and political rights. They can be instrumental, for instance, in the vitality of a soup kitchen, or in the success of a winter coat campaign. They can slow down or speed up the political process, without ever becoming involved in it, but through their own deeds. In the midst of political and even civil strife, they play an important role in diffusing potentially explosive situations, such as revising a municipal budget to alter the impact of a proposed property tax increase.

It is clear—and the events surrounding the failed response to the victims of Hurricane Katrina are unequivocal proof—that a deep understanding of the human rights framework can help public administrators to reach decisions that correspond to the hopes, aspirations, and ambitions of the vast majority of people, where no one is left out. They must not wait for disaster to strike. They can integrate such preoccupations into their daily lives. The addition of this knowledge will have a substantial impact on the development of the necessary skills to promote law and order within the comprehensive theme of constitutional equality and to regulate effectively within the framework of statutory authority, policy, and the confines of domestic and international law.

Adding to the vicissitudes of administrative life are the administrators’ obligations to diverse constituencies, some of which may be losers in the political process, and may be deprived of full civil deference, but are nonetheless part of the whole they must serve. The administrator’s level of sensitivity to the nuances of economically, socially, and culturally diverse groups can only be refined through a thorough understanding of human rights, which will model the delivery of services in unbiased ways. This is a central—indeed, the core preoccupation—of social equity proponents.

The United States has never been a land of homogeneous peoples, despite a considerable historical domination of one group over others. This fact should not stand in the way of the administrator’s ability to pursue administrative activity with full regard for the differences that the legislative process is incapable of see-

ing or predicting. The fair materialization of legislative authority depends largely on the capacity of public administrators to recognize the human dimensions that surround diversity in the midst of broad communities.

There are ample reasons for optimism. The human rights legacy in the United States, although in need of rebirth, finds full or partial expression in all but three states. In fact, 46 percent of U.S. states maintain statewide Human Rights Commissions; 28 percent maintain Civil Rights Commissions; 10 percent have either Human Affairs or Human Relations Commissions; and another 10 percent have either Equal Opportunity or Anti-Discrimination Commissions or offices (excludes Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands). Only Mississippi, Nevada, and Wyoming lack such structures (Human Rights Enforcement Project, 2006).

Although these commissions currently deal mostly with individual grievances related to violations of particular rights, especially civil rights, they nonetheless offer a unique opportunity for education and advocacy. Graduate programs in public administration can take advantage of these structures in order to expand the knowledge base of their programs and, in turn, reciprocate with professionals whose level of expertise is substantially expanded. As colleges and universities prepare thousands of students to head the modeling and delivery of public services and programs, to control crime, to apply legislation to everyday situations, and to be the face of government administration, it would seem proper, if not absolutely necessary, that such students would have a profound knowledge of international human rights instruments, which the United States has vowed to follow in its own territories. As a result, students would develop a greater understanding of social equity and shore up their future professional experience with a sense of justice and fairness. It is no longer correct to assume that there is a range of neutral competence within which administrators can act, free from moral considerations. Public administrators have, as argued by most contemporary literature in the field, substantial input in policymaking and in resource allocation.

A logical follow-up to the above arguments and to the background that governments provide in the area of human rights will have to include a closer analysis of graduate programs in schools of public administration and policy and their value orientations, because these should represent the most prominent source of administrators for municipal and state governments. Other arguments pertaining to globalization, complex trade agreements, and the continuous flow of diverse cultural patterns that blend with longstanding and often dominant cultural traditions lend further legitimacy to the effort of teaching human rights in public administration graduate programs. U.S. graduate programs in public administration and policy can no longer afford to prepare leaders who do not understand the contextual correlations between U.S. public affairs and world affairs, especially in the area of human rights, or refer such knowledge acquisition to specialized areas of administration and policy. What better route to take, instead, but that offered by social equity theory? The portal of human rights is open, and accessible, as an

apt venue for the incorporation of global social equity in the public affairs curriculum.

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*Human Rights Theory as a Means for Incorporating Social Equity into the PA Curriculum*

*Policy Interests in an Era of Deregulation*, available from M. E. Sharpe, Inc., examines the California energy crisis of 2002 and the conflicts between state policy interests and market interests.

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