

Reflections: Diversity and the Administrative State Book Reviews

Kyle Farmbry, Administration and the Other: Explorations of Diversity and Marginalization in the Political Administrative State (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009). 212 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN: 9780739119105.

Diversity discussions centered on public administration and public policy can take multiple paths. One such discussion can revolve around the organizational management of a diverse workforce. How to get the representation of a workforce to reflect the community it works with is a different discussion. Social equity and policy implications highlight another distinct discussion relating to diversity and the public sector. Recent calls for culturally competent public organizations outline yet an additional path for diversity discussions. All four areas of diversity discourse have been, and continue to be, covered by public administration scholars (see Dolan and Rosenbloom 2003; Frederickson 1990; Riccucci 2002; Rice 2008). However, there remains a conceptual aspect of diversity and the administrative state that requires further reflection.

Administration and the Other, authored by Kyle Farmbry, takes on the issue of diversity and the administrative state with a critical review of key events in American history. Farmbry sets out to encourage critical reflection on diversity, especially in the context of policy implications for historically marginalized groups. He employs a theoretical framework that lends itself to asking critical questions in regard to policy decisions that significantly affect “the other.” The concept of “the other” varies from one generation to the next, from one region of the country to the next, and from one policy to the next. As Farmbry points out, others have been immigrant communities settling in New York City tenements at the turn of the twentieth century, Japanese Americans sent to internment camps during World War II, African Americans seeking equality during the 1950s and 1960s, and persons of Middle Eastern descent viewed with suspicion aboard a plane after September 11, 2001.

As a means for reflection and analysis, *Administration and the Other* utilizes three theoretical approaches: archeology, positionality, and sociology of knowledge. As Farmbry suggests, the three approaches provide context for “how ‘others’ are constructed in the political and administrative discourse and the effect on such constructions on policy development” (xiv). Archeology of knowledge, drawing on theories of power, emphasizes how power provides one with a position for creating the direction of a particular discourse. Power enables one to define and limit the scope of definitions within that discourse. Positionality of knowledge explores the role that elevated status plays in shaping views about particular groups. Similar to power, position enables one to shape perspectives of truth. Finally, sociology of knowledge “emerges as a reaction to the positivistic leanings that were shaping the evolution of many social sciences throughout the twentieth century” (7). As Farmbry points out, knowledge creation and development are not individual processes, but rather processes in which many individuals participate or have participated. Our thought patterns are inherited from the society we are in.

After outlining the theoretical context, *Administration and the Other* turns to various historical points in the United States, and the author reflects on and explores the conceptualization of the other through the intersection of the archeology, positionality, and sociology of knowledge. The task, Farmbry proposes, is for students, scholars, and practitioners of political and administrative processes to recognize and reflect on our process of constructing the other. Moreover, this aim should be continually revisited, he argues, so as to best understand the strategies that shape, administer, and evaluate our policies. Farmbry takes on this task through a critical reflection on poignant and important periods of American history.

The birth of the United States as an American institution brought together experts and intellectuals of an elite class in the drafting of the founding documents. This founding period, when the exclusion of women,

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blacks, indentured servants, and the lower classes was prominent, set the foundation for a history of marginalized groups in American society. For example, Farmbry's discussion of slavery points out how "the social image of blacks that developed through various channels of discourse in the early years of the nation shaped a system, based on perception and classification, that influenced the lives of subsequent generations and underscored the development and institutionalization of a system of slavery" (30). This, Farmbry argues, was a critical development that set the foundation for continuous separation between groups of people.

This period of the developing nation is also explored through the context of Native American populations. Farmbry argues that the "evolving notions of the Native American as the Other enabled the emergence of policies of removal and other atrocities committed by actors working in political and administrative roles" (38). Explicit views of Native Americans as "savages" justified future actions, such as the relocation of some 100,000 Native Americans between 1830 and 1850.

In examining historical periods and events, *Administration and the Other* also calls attention to policy and programmatic inaction. African Americans were significantly affected during the Progressive Era of the early 1900s by the lack of policy protection. Farmbry argues that images of the African American male during the era led to political and administrative "ambivalence" around incidents of lynching (70). The overt omission of administrative action led the 2005 U.S. Senate to pass a resolution that apologized for the lack of institutional action on lynching throughout the twentieth century.

The discussion next turns to the immigrants of the early twentieth century. Specifically, it turns to those immigrants who were of Southern and Eastern European descent, as well as those who immigrated from China to the West Coast. Response to this new wave of immigrants called for assimilation, restriction, and elimination. Restriction was overt through policies such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Immigration Quota Act of 1924. Elimination centered on efforts driven by concepts of "breeding out" the perceived negative traits of the new immigrants (83).

The notion of the immigrant as the other resurfaces at the turn of the twenty-first century. Farmbry underscores the importance of immigration by devoting two chapters to the topic. The Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 addressed what "proponents argued were threats to American Society" (147). There emerged a shift in the image of the immigrant to one viewed

as a threat to the economy and security. Farmbry questions whether policy should be shaped according to negative images or whether there are other images worth exploring. Do policies ignore the benefits that immigrants can bring to communities, and should policies be leveraging the talents of people from various groups?

An additional period of American history that Farmbry reviews is the 1950s and the role that housing policies played in the creation of segregated cities throughout the country. African American migration north to cities such as Chicago resulted in housing policies that culminated in highly segregated cities. The argument is made that housing policies reinforced segregation and helped "contribute to cycles of poverty" that continued through the century (88). It was the perceptions of the other that helped formulate policy that would ensure segregated communities. Applying a theoretical framework for reflection on housing policies can lend itself to asking critical questions about the recent housing crisis and the marginalized communities that were affected by subprime lending. As noted in a recent *New York Times* article, the rise in home foreclosures significantly affected minority populations (Powell and Roberts 2009), which raises the issue of lending practices to the other.

In the end, Farmbry goes beyond simply having a discussion on diversity by providing a theoretical context that people can employ to examine any administrative decision. Analysis of policy and programmatic decisions should reflect on their implications for historically marginalized groups. The approaches outlined allow for critical examination of contemporary and future issues of American society. New waves of immigration, current housing and lending policies, and same-sex marriage policy are just a small sample of national discussions that have potential implications for the other. *Administration and the Other* would fit well into any political science and public administration course, but also could find a prominent place in many social science courses.

References

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