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# *SOCIAL CLASS AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION A Closed Question Opens*

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*The American Society for Public Administration's (ASPA) Code of Ethics commits it to representativeness, fairness, equality, and affirmative action. Notwithstanding these goals, mainstream public administration teachings, texts, and journals mostly ignore the role of social class in understanding the how and why of bureaucratic operations. This is especially puzzling given all the studies showing that socioeconomic status affects most life outcomes and, in turn, government's response to the resulting discrepancies. This study reviews the field's neglect of class matters and shows how this oversight limits the range of possible policy options available for consideration. The discussion closes by (a) suggesting ways to address this omission and (b) explaining how the recommended reforms are consistent with ASPA's Code of Ethics.*

**Keywords:** *socioeconomic status; social class; affirmative action; inequality; social equity; representative bureaucracy*

I-2: Oppose all forms of discrimination and harassment, and promote affirmative action.

I-8: Be prepared to make decisions that may not be popular.

II-7: Promote constitutional principles of equality, fairness, representativeness, responsiveness and due process in protecting citizens' rights.

—American Society for Public Administration's  
*Code of Ethics*, back cover<sup>1</sup>

**Assume you are Mr. Suter** in the following scenario. Answer the questions presented at the end of the discussion.

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Bob Wayson teaches high school in Delaware. He has taught 11th-grade civics for the past 8 years and has consistently (5 of the last 6 years) received the school's "teacher of the year" award. Recently, Wayson's departmental head, Mr. Suter, sent him a congratulatory note praising Bob's accomplishments. Furthermore, Suter suggested that Wayson expand his instructional techniques to include "realistic" approaches to government operations. That is, he encouraged Wayson to emphasize more "real-world politics."

Wayson followed Suter's advice. On the second day of class this semester, Wayson announced that he had the seating chart before him and that "this chart lists averages attained by students over the last five semesters who were sitting in each of the respective fifty chairs in this room." For example, assume the last five students registered the following final averages: (a) 74%, (b) 98%, (c) 85%, (d) 57%, and (e) 61%. The average for all five scores would be 75%,  $[(74 + 98 + 85 + 57 + 61) / 5]$ . Wayson explained that the student presently sitting in each seat would have his or her final grade included with the average scores achieved by the last five people who had sat in the respective chairs. For example, if the last five students had a 75% average and the present occupant scored 90%, the present occupant's course grade would be a C,  $[(75 \times 5) + 90] / 6 = 77.5\%$ . Wayson further stated that based on a random drawing of names, one student with a C, D, or F average (that is, the average of the last five scores and the present occupant's final class average) would receive an A. Conversely, a student with an A average (that is, the average of the last five scores and the present occupant's final class average) at semester's end would get an F if his or her name were selected in a separate random drawing.

Wayson explained his new policy as follows: He said his supervisor had suggested that he, Wayson, use a more realistic approach to teaching civics. Wayson stated that his grade assignment method accurately reflected America's social class structure in terms of upward mobility chances and the problem of inherited wealth.

Because of Wayson's past teaching experiences, students thought he would not use his proposed scheme. At the semester's end, Wayson graded as promised.

Unfortunately for Wayson, Mayor David Temple's daughter was in the class. Lori Temple's final average was 95%. However, when combined with her "inherited" average (62%), her final grade was a D,  $[(62 \times 5) + 95] / 6 = 67.5\%$ . Wayson's grading scheme outraged Temple and he demanded that Wayson either (a) change Lori's grade or (b) be fired. Wayson offered a simple defense. He said he was "only following his supervisor's orders." He restated his supervisor's advice about offering a more realistic course. He had kept Mr. Suter's note.

Following a hearing on Mayor Temple's complaint, Suter asked Wayson to change Lori's grade. "As a matter of principle—freedom in the classroom," Wayson refused to alter the grade. He argued that his new grading approach was very realistic and he thought, "it effectively teaches students about America's *real* social mobility chances."

Temple has considerable influence over the school board.

If you were Mr. Suter, what would you do about this issue? Why?

### **THE ROLE OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS IN EVERYDAY EVENTS**

There is considerable literature showing the strong connection between socioeconomic status (SES) and various life outcomes. A sampling of the findings shows, for example, that compared to lower SES people, higher class people live longer (Adler & Ostrove, 1999; Paltrow, 2000; Yen & Moss, 1999), have higher self-esteem (Yando, Seitz, & Zigler, 1979), have better dental health (Huntington, Krall, Garcia, & Spiro, 1999; Milgrom et al., 1998), vote in greater numbers (Clymer, 1996; Milbrath & Goel, 1977), have lower mental retardation rates (Lundberg, 1974), and play state lotteries less (Clotfelter & Cook, 1989). Loewen (1995) described SES and some of its effects as follows:

Social class is probably the single most important variable in society. From womb to tomb, it correlates with almost all other social characteristics of people that we can measure. Affluent expectant mothers are more likely to get prenatal care, receive current medical advice, and enjoy general health, fitness, and nutrition. Rich babies get more time and verbal interaction with their parents and higher quality day care when not with their parents (pp. 197-198).

The effects of SES are especially pronounced in education. Research shows, for example, that youngsters from families of lower SES are less likely to ever attend school, attend private schools, pass every grade without failing, be graduated from high school, attend college, be graduated from college, attend graduate school, become college professors, and so forth. Boatsman and Antony (1995), deLone (1979), Kahlenberg (1996), Lipset and Ladd (1979), Mikulak (1990), and Stetar and Finkelstein (1997) provide an excellent review of this literature.

Gradually, America has fashioned numerous government programs to help the lower classes overcome their inherent hardships. For example, an extensive public bureaucracy has been established to (a) teach parents of lower SES proper child care, (b) provide dental care and subsidized meals to grade school children of lower SES, (c) prepare children of lower SES for preschool and college, and (d) offer subsidized health care for people of lower SES.

Although, technically, *social class*, *socioeconomic status*, *class*, and similar terms have slightly different meanings, they all entail notions of *comparative rank*, usually based on income, education, and wealth. Each individual's or group of individuals' standing is established relative to the remaining population (see, e.g., Nam & Powers, 1983). Therefore, and to avoid monotony by overemploying one term, the present discussion uses the various and closely allied *class* descriptors interchangeably. The meaning of each reference should be clear from its use in context. In the generic discussions about class, the reference is to more general notions of relative placement or to how individual researchers operationalize the term. The present discussion also considers inherited wealth, or unearned standing, as integral to social stratification.

### DISCUSSION OUTLINE

The remaining discussion has eight sections. Section One describes the social equity movement in public administration (PA) and shows how adherents to this philosophy seek to counteract the oligarchical tendencies inherent to all organizations. In particular, social equity supporters say that, because government agencies tend to give better services to citizens of higher social, economic, and political status, public administrators should fight this trend by assuring that disadvantaged groups receive equal or even superior attention.

Section Two illustrates how the quest for representative bureaucracy is integral to social equity. Proponents of this approach argue that the public sector workforce should closely resemble the demographic characteristics of the citizenry it serves. Representative bureaucracies assure that all group interests are included in the decision-making process and that this, in turn, legitimates government practices. Historically, because women and minorities have been underrepresented in the bureaucracy, affirmative action has been used to increase their presence in the public workforce.

This greater representation has resulted in significant gains—more social equity—for these disadvantaged groups.

Section Three describes how, over the years, backing for race-based and gender-based affirmative action plans has eroded. Meanwhile, courts and various public commentators have expressed growing support for class-based affirmative action. This suggests that SES should become integral to the social equity movement by being included in affirmative action plans.

Section Four shows how inherited wealth contradicts social equity. Although most social equity writers and public commentators readily acknowledge racial and sexual discrimination, few challenge the legitimacy of family inheritances that allow some individuals to start the race far ahead of their peers. This part of the discussion uses the opening scenario to view unearned standing more analytically.

Section Five offers examples of how PA's commitment to social equity disregards the importance of SES including inherited wealth. To date, the field has narrowly viewed *disadvantaged* to primarily include women and minorities. Today, most PA students finish their studies without ever having considered how strongly SES affects the array and purpose of executive branch operations.

Section Six proposes four reasons for PA's neglect of the effects of social class issues on bureaucracy. This list ranges from how classist attitudes permeate American culture to biases in how government officials collect and publicize economic data.

Section Seven suggests six ways to integrate social class concerns into mainstream PA theory and practice. The list is both practical and bold and extends from advice on how the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) can foster class consciousness within the field to why PA should include SES criteria in affirmative action programs. This latter proposal derives from court rulings and related popular writings saying that SES is an acceptable social equity criterion for increasing bureaucratic representation.

Section Eight, the Conclusion, offers final comments on what the neglect of social class issues says about the field of PA. This section proposes arguments to counteract those who contend that any PA-led effort toward greater social equity is wrong because it represents *social engineering* and *government intervention*.

### THE SOCIAL EQUITY MOVEMENT IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

In the 1920s, Michels studied the German Social Democratic party and found that even this flat organization eventually developed a leadership that perpetuated itself by choosing replacements with similar characteristics. These elites gained status, in part, because they had more information about organizational operations. Knowing and understanding little about the party apparatus, rank-and-file members soon became alienated and, at the same time, passively dependent on the elite for their well-being. Eventually, this new leadership perpetuated itself by choosing replacements with like traits. According to Michels (1962), all organizations have this tendency. He observed, "Who says organization says oligarchy" (p. 15).

America has used various tactics to counteract its own oligarchical tendencies. Contemporary PA focuses on achieving social equity. Frederickson (1990) traced the roots of this movement to 1968 when reformers said "social equity should be the third pillar for the theory and practice of public administration" (p. 235). Pops and Pavlak (1991) summarized the campaign's tenets this way:

It is based on egalitarian principles and is concerned with the public administrator's role in bringing about a more equitable distribution of public benefits and government jobs.

The social equity approach assumes that public administrators are not and should not be value-neutral. The delivery of public services typically varies depending on the recipient's social, economic and political status—the higher the status, the better the service. The public administrator is morally obligated to counter this tendency by making decisions in the direction of providing greater equity in service delivery. Variations from equity should always be in the direction of more services to the disadvantaged (p. 16).

### THE QUEST FOR REPRESENTATIVE BUREAUCRACY

A precursor of this social equity campaign was a growing concern with representative bureaucracy. This emphasis emerged almost 60 years ago when Kingsley (1944) said that the public workforce should closely resemble the demographic characteristics of the citizenry. Krislov (1974) later proposed that government legitimacy and credibility depend on having all major elements of the society participate in the bureaucracy.

Riccucci and Sidel (1997) argued that representative PA gives voice to "the preferences of a heterogeneous population . . . [and assures everyone's

views] will be [included] in bureaucratic decision making” (p. 423). Many studies have tested whether the proportion of women and minority employees fairly reflects their respective percentages in the population (Ricucci & Saidel, 1997, p. 425). Consistent with most earlier literature, Ricucci and Saidel found that women and racial minorities are usually underrepresented in higher “policy making positions in state government across the nation” (p. 423).

Being concerned about representative bureaucracies shows that society values fairness and equality for its people. If a bureaucracy is judged unrepresentative, agency officials might adopt compensatory policies. Affirmative action, for example, is used to increase workforce diversity. Historically, this has meant hiring more minorities and women.

Undoubtedly, affirmative action practices have affected public policy outcomes in various ways. Within universities, for instance, women and minority professors have forcefully and successfully advocated for their respective interests. Besides fostering pride in their heritage (as in being *African American* instead of *colored* or *woman* instead of *girl*), they have founded campus associations and sections within professional societies that study and advocate their views including race-based and gender-based employment policies (see, e.g., Rubin, 2000).

### THE LAW AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Over the past several years, courts and the public have become increasingly less supportive of race-based and gender-based affirmative action programs. Today, judges hold all race-based remedies to strict scrutiny. This means that, unless the state shows a compelling interest for its policy and its actions are narrowly fashioned to remedy specific offenses, courts will reject the statute or affirmative action plan. In practice, this has meant the demise of almost all race-based diversity programs (see Dykhouse, 1996; Elmore, 1996; Rice & Mongkuo, 1998).

Courts use intermediate scrutiny to decide gender-based remedies. This means judges are slightly more tolerant of programs that compensate for past discrimination based on sexual bias (see Dykhouse, 1996; *Hopwood et al. v. State of Texas*, 1994; Kahlenberg, 1996, p. 262, note 121 on this point). The judiciary’s rejection of race-based affirmative action programs has been compounded by public referenda requiring elimination of race-based and gender-based preferences. In 1996, for instance, Californians adopted Proposition 209, which “prohibits the state, local



governments, districts, public universities, colleges, and schools, and other government instrumentalities from discriminating against or giving preferential treatment to any individual or group in public employment, public education, or public contracting on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin” (Attorney General, n.d.).

Although support for race-based and gender-based affirmative action programs has been waning, it is interesting that both conservative and liberal judges, legislators, and various public commentators seem willing to support SES-based affirmative action plans. For instance, in its famous *Hopwood* decision, the court held that, although a state law school cannot use racial quotas to enhance student diversity, entrance committees might weigh an applicant’s socioeconomic background (see *Hopwood et al. v. State of Texas*, 1994; Morton, 1993, pp. 1116-1117, for more discussion on this point). Hence, although a minority applicant would not receive favorable consideration simply because she is Hispanic, she could garner the committee’s support because her parents only finished sixth grade and were migrant farm workers.

### REWARDS OF UNEARNED STANDING

Accumulated wealth is integral to capitalism. In a market economy, affluence is the primary register of success. In theory, at least, the best producers and employees make the most profit. Under this social system, the government protects private property and enforces contracts.

According to legal fiction, the first generation begins the capitalist race at the same point. However, by the second era, the contestants start the competition at different places depending on their parents’ successes or failures. The affluent can bequeath wealth to their heirs, which skews the race against the poorer classes (see, e.g., Brittain, 1977). Presumably, the greater the inheritance, *ceteris paribus*, the greater the heir’s advantage.

Obviously, financial legacies are not the only benefit. There are many others including the prestige attending wealth (“my folks are lawyers”) and having a nurturing family (see Loewen’s comments above). Having parents of higher SES raises one’s chances of gaining the skills needed for later success in life ranging from social contacts to good health care to attending schools with high per-student expenditures.

As noted, affirmative action helps organizations overcome their own oligarchical tendencies. In part, affirmative action has been used to compensate women and minorities for their historic underrepresentation in the

workplace. Although the future of affirmative action is uncertain, few would deny that females and minorities have faced considerable prejudice and discrimination and that this has prevented them from reaching their full potential.

Apply this same logic to Wayson's (see opening scenario) grading standards. Because the popular press rarely challenges the legitimacy of unearned advantage, it is hard to fully appreciate how received wealth affects social equity. The scenario at the beginning offers a discussion point for reexamining what we assume about inheritances. What would you do if you were Mr. Suter? Why? What lesson is Wayson teaching?

Wayson helps show existing conditions in a new light. It is a convenient way of getting people to reexamine their everyday, accepted assumptions about inheritances, and, thus, question the legitimacy of a social system that allows some people, based solely on choosing the right parents, to start the race far ahead of their cohorts.

Shaw (1928) called the first chapter of his *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* "A Closed Question Opens." Here he discussed how most people take certain social arrangements for granted. When people reconsider a long-held assumption, this amounts to "a closed question opens." To date, the effects of social class on life outcomes, and not just in the form of inherited wealth, remain a closed question in academic PA.

### **THE SOCIAL CLASS BIAS WITHIN ACADEMIC PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

Recall that Pops and Pavlak (1991) said, "Equity should always be in the direction of more services to the disadvantaged" (p. 16). So far, PA has taken a narrow view of which groups are disadvantaged. Over the past 10 years *Public Administration Review* (PAR) has not published anything on the distribution of wealth,<sup>2</sup> inherited standing, or social class. Other than Miller's (1992) piece about why U.S. workers should receive higher wages, which is not really about SES, the "premiere journal of public administration" disregards the effects of social class on public policy development. Meanwhile, PAR publishes, as it should, numerous pieces on gender and race. The journal's "Index by Subject" under "Diversity" never lists social class, notwithstanding the growing support for class-based affirmative action programs. (The same description applies to

Broadnax's [2000] lengthy *Diversity and Affirmative Action in Public Service*.)

Likewise, aside from Ventriss' (1998) theoretical piece on "radical democratic thought" (p. 239), which only mentions class in passing, *American Review of Public Administration* has not published anything on SES or the distribution of wealth over the past 10 years. Meanwhile, like *PAR*, it has offered several articles on women and minorities.

Standard PA texts are equally indifferent to social class. Cigler's (2000) book-review article in *Journal of Public Affairs Education* considers five introductory PA texts. Not one of these books mentions the effects of inherited standing, the distribution of wealth, social class, or how SES shapes which groups will need what government services. Seemingly, social class is irrelevant to understanding the needs and purposes of executive branch operations.

Similarly, no article in Rabin, Hildreth, and Miller's (1998) 1,221-page *Handbook of Public Administration* (2nd ed.) directly addresses social class. Although there is passing reference to the so-called "War on Poverty" (pp. 487-488), the authors (deLone & Overman, 1998) mention nothing about the unequal distribution of wealth. They only focus on how this war failed and caused "considerable intellectual retrenchment" (deLone & Overman, 1998, p. 488) among policy analysts. There is no mention of the alternative view that certain Office of Economic Opportunity programs were too successful, because they became a war on wealth (Oldfield, 1988) and, therefore, had to be nullified.

Furthermore, and despite its title, Fry and Nigro's (1998) *Handbook* article on "Five Great Issues in the Profession of Public Administration" ignores any reference to social class or the distribution of wealth. Although Fry and Nigro cover the so-called politics/administration dichotomy, they never question the politics of omitting subjects from the debate.

The field's disregard for social class was particularly evident in 1998 when the National Conference theme in Seattle was "Cutting Edge." No panels focused on SES concerns. Truth in advertising should have provoked meeting organizers to list the conference theme as "Cutting Edge, At Least for Public Administration."

Finally, ASPA has a Conference on Minority Public Administrators (COMPA) and a Section on Women for Public Administration (SWPA). Given PA's history, not surprisingly, there is no subdivision devoted exclusively to social class.

Thus, notwithstanding an overwhelming body of empirical literature, PA seems oblivious to how class and unequal wealth distribution affect

life outcomes. Concern for the disadvantaged still excludes classism. Even the so-called "New Public Administration" (Frederickson, 1980; Marini, 1971) paid little attention to these matters, especially questioning inherited standing.

### WHY PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IGNORES SOCIAL CLASS CONCERNS

Perhaps if we understood why PA is apathetic to SES, we could correct this oversight and fulfill the promise of the 1998 Seattle conference theme. Although the ensuing list is speculative and certainly not exhaustive, it might help frame further discussion on this point.

First, universities, notwithstanding their popular image for critical thinking and being insulated from social prejudice, are part of a wider mindset that mostly accepts the legitimacy of inherited standing and social class inequality (see Frederickson, 1990, p. 234). Lipsitz (1997) argued that most of American culture seems unwilling to acknowledge the pervasive effects of SES. He explained, "The existence and importance of gender and race are recognized, reinforced, and represented repeatedly in political and journalistic discourse as well as in advertising and entertainment. But social class is another matter" (p. 11). Raskin (1996) called social class "the great unmentionable of American politics" (p. 42). For Freedman (1998), "class [is] the social fault line that our nation pretends does not exist" (p. 15A).

Lipsitz (1997) extended this view to the university, where he said social class is mostly "eras[ed]" (p. 20) from the curriculum (see also Boatsman & Antony, 1995). This omission perpetuates a higher class ethos that is less amenable to certain policy options or, what Lipsitz called, "social possibilities" (p. 20). Eventually, this oversight makes students oblivious to "potential political alternatives" (Ryan, 1989, p. 169), such as policies directed against classism (see also Adler & Ostrove, 1999, p. 13).

Second, language subtly reinforces social class prejudices. Consider, for example, the often-heard phrase *poor but honest*, which the media, among others, sometimes use to describe a famous person's background: "His folks were poor but honest." If fans of Sam Donaldson, the popular TV news journalist, check the record, they will learn, "He comes from a poor but honest family" (Scott, 1984). Likewise, in explaining "The Story of the Opera," program notes for the Vienna Boys' Choir read,

In a small village not too far from the Palace, the poor but honest Schoolmaster receives a letter from His Royal Highness, the Prince, telling him that he soon plans to visit the village and would be delighted to see his old friend and his "four daughters" once again.

What if *poor* were replaced with an ethnic reference: "His parents were Hispanic but honest."<sup>3</sup>

The effects of classist language on possible policy options are especially obvious when discussing economic standing. By definition, poverty is a relative status: Economic rank depends on what percent of the total wealth you hold. By definition, if there are wealthy citizens, others will be poor. This fact is mostly ignored when discussing various social policies. For example, children of poor families are *underprivileged*, whereas their wealthier counterparts are not *overprivileged*. (Word and WordPerfect accept *underprivileged* but redline *overprivileged*). Likewise, Coles called his 1977 study of children from wealthy families *Privileged Ones*, not *Overprivileged Ones*. Finally, Word and WordPerfect highlight *classism* as unknown. *Racism* and *sexism* are in the software vocabulary.

The list of examples of classist language could go on, but this should make the point and, by implication, show how words work to, as Lipsitz says, limit our consideration of "potential political alternatives." Our sensitivity toward class prejudice does not parallel our concern with race, gender, and other forms of bias.

Third, on its face, one would expect faculty whose parents were of lower SES to be in the vanguard advocating for PA to acknowledge the importance of class in understanding bureaucracy. The popular culture discourages this behavior; faculty are understandably self-conscious about their lower class roots (Kahlenberg, 1996, p. 175). Academics from this background talk of *passing* (acting, dressing, and speaking middle class, and concealing their roots) and their fear of *outing* (having someone reveal their origins) (Dews & Law, 1995; Ryan & Shackrey, 1984). Being lower class, with its poor but honest connotations, is to be escaped not heralded (Steinberg, 2001). Classism continues mostly unchallenged, almost like a *class ceiling*.

Finally, except in rare instances, the government's data collection procedures and philosophy reveal both its own classism and its penchant for subtly discouraging certain research questions (see, e.g., Adler & Ostrove, 1999, p. 10). Consider, for example, how the Commerce Department issues well-publicized monthly reports on inflation rates, unemployment levels, factory orders, consumer confidence, and the cost of living, among

others. Department officials do not publicize monthly figures about (a) the distribution of wealth and income or (b) social mobility odds (Rose, 1996). The economic game is played without announcing the score. Certainly, such omissions shape the sorts of "social possibilities" (Lipsitz, 1997, p. 20) and "potential political alternatives" (Ryan, 1989, p. 169) academics might study and support. (See (a) Shakeshaft (1998) for discussion about how the absence of gender-based and race-based data has affected research on women and minorities and (b) Jonas (1999, p. 15) for how the absence of a government-established "social class index" has hindered our understanding of health care utilization in the United States compared with the British government's practice of classifying demographic data this way.)

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTEGRATING SOCIAL CLASS CONCERNS INTO MAINSTREAM PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

The need to study and understand the role of social class and social class origin in bureaucratic operations certainly seems compatible with the ASPA Code of Ethics listed at the beginning of this discussion, especially the need to sometimes make decisions that may not be popular. The ensuing paragraphs propose six practical means of integrating SES concerns into mainstream PA. Obviously, this is an initial offering and, if convincing, will provoke more suggestions for reform.

First, and perhaps most obviously, ASPA and the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration should become leaders in integrating class issues into our field. Concern with the unequal distribution of wealth should be as widespread as the study of sexism; racism; incrementalism; planning, organization, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting (POSDCORB); and the politics/administration dichotomy, to name only a few hub issues. The first step in building any social movement is consciousness raising, meaning that students and faculty must expand their teaching and research efforts to include the role of SES in understanding PA theory and practice. We should follow Wayson's (opening scenario) example, if not his grading strategy, of having students look beyond culturally imposed limitations about class. Students should learn to see the question of wealth distribution and inherited standing in new ways similar to what happened when PA began reconsidering the roles of women and minorities (see, e.g., Guy, 1994).

These revised teaching and research objectives should be multifaceted. For example, we should acknowledge that poverty is a relative term and that when some people take more than their fair share, this reduces everyone else's part. In practice, this might mean asking students to understand the classism inherent in discussing only *minimum wage laws* and not *maximum wage laws*. Even though we may not think of it this way, the National Basketball Association uses maximum wage laws (contractually accepted *salary caps*) so that all teams have a better chance of winning the championship. Thus, some professions already use redistributive practices to assure greater social equity.

We should also encourage students to use whimsical thinking in reevaluating common administrative practices. Theodore Geisel, alias Dr. Seuss, defined *whimsy* as looking through the wrong end of the telescope. Students could use this approach to ask themselves, for example, why our government sends social workers among the *underprivileged* to counsel them about adapting to a lack of resources. Why not send social workers among the wealthy to instruct them about the consequences of their greed and recommend alternative social policies? Although it is unlikely that government officials will soon redirect their social work philosophy, whimsical thinking can prompt students to see old problems in a new light versus blaming the victim (Ryan, 1971).

PA should expand its list of descriptors to include such terms as *overprivileged*, *overserved*, and *unearned standing*. Further, PA should acknowledge that, although there has been considerable hand-wringing about whether welfare—read “just giving them money”—diminishes the lower class' interest in work, we should ask ourselves why we do not apply this same standard to people who receive substantial inheritances.

Admittedly, classism may be the hardest *ism* to fight, because it challenges the students' (and the majority of people's) most fundamental values about success and hard work. Still, as the ASPA Code of Ethics advocates, sometimes it is necessary to take unpopular stands in teaching, research, and writing. After all, most of today's accepted practices were considered objectionable when introduced many years ago.

Second, ASPA should restructure its national conferences in both form and content. The registration fees could be lowered if the meetings were held during the summer at different college campuses. This would also eliminate the confiscatory hotel fees conferees now pay. These charges could be replaced by inexpensive dorm room rents.

This list of money-saving ideas for ASPA conferences could go on, but the point is that the national meetings are grossly overpriced and pretentious.



If ASPA banned women and ethnic minorities from its regional and national sessions, there would be well-deserved outcries of *racism* and *sexism*. Yet, we accept the classism inherent in a conference system that is too expensive for many lower ranking public employees and other less prosperous people to attend. True, no law prohibits anyone from participating in these events, but, still, existing practices are hauntingly reminiscent of Anatole France's (1924) famous observation, "the majestic equality of the laws . . . forbid[s] rich and poor alike to sleep under . . . bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal . . . bread" (p. 75). ASPA should revise its conference philosophy so that the organization attracts more lower SES participants.

This change in conference thinking should be accompanied by an equally diligent effort toward recruiting more people of lower SES into ASPA, even including welfare<sup>4</sup> recipients and the homeless. We need more bottom-up views of administration. Janitors, police officers, cooks, administrative support staff, and various lower ranking public employees and program participants could teach us a lot about the everyday effects of bureaucracy including how management might integrate more of their ideas into decision making (see, e.g., Rich, 1996). Certainly this broader participation would add considerably to the diversity we consider essential to developing more rational public policies. The conference's call for proposals should encourage conveners to include more lower SES panelists, such as janitors, cooks, and secretaries, as happens now with gender and race.

Third, ASPA should expand its political agenda to include social class issues. In the middle 1980s, the organization refused to hold its annual meeting in Chicago because Illinois had not passed the Equal Rights Amendment. Consider this stand in light of how most elementary and secondary schools in America are funded, that is, mostly through real estate taxes. Because of wide disparities in property wealth among educational jurisdictions, some schools can afford to spend considerably more per student than their counterparts, even though they have a lower mil levy (tax rate). According to Kozol (1991), this results in savage inequalities. He offered vivid and moving descriptions of how some school districts, because of their low property wealth, cannot give students even the basic physical amenities essential to learning, such as classroom space, contemporary lab equipment, and bathrooms with operable flush toilets. Meanwhile, wealthier districts provide their students with advanced math classes, the latest computer technologies, and highly paid teachers. (Hence the designation *class rooms*?)



If ASPA is really committed to social equity, then its membership should use its economic and moral powers to insist on roughly equal per-pupil spending across school districts within each state. Just as with the Equal Rights Amendment, ASPA should not hold national conferences in states with significant per-student funding disparities.

School financing is only one of many existing conspicuous, class-based inequalities. ASPA could challenge numerous others including application of the death penalty and the complacency of inadequate programs for the homeless. ASPA could be a national leader in this regard. Challenging school funding inequities should be only the first step in an ASPA-led assault on class discrimination.

Fourth, ASPA should advocate that government agencies collect and publicize monthly data detailing the distribution of wealth as public officials do now with unemployment, inflation, and leading economic indicators, among others. Alone, numbers can have power, as happened when women used 59% (what women made compared to men performing the same work) as the watchword for challenging wage discrimination.

The old adage is, "What gets counted gets done." Perhaps if Americans were constantly briefed on figures relating to the distribution of wealth and similar matters, there would be greater support for policies designed to redistribute resources downward.<sup>5</sup> At a minimum, ASPA should acknowledge that not publicizing this information is *politics* by omission.

Fifth, ASPA should expand its affirmative action commitment to include SES (hereafter SESAA, i.e., SES-based affirmative action). Given recent court rulings and citizen initiatives, low social class might be the only remaining criterion available for increasing diversity. This SESAA effort should be expansive, meaning it should include more than the traditional categories such as students. The new goal should be to increase diversity within the higher ranking occupations such as university faculty. As noted earlier, the professoriate is disproportionately the offspring of higher SES families.<sup>6</sup> In this case, SES could be defined via the Nam-Powers-Terrie scale (NPT) (Nam & Powers, 1983, with updates after each Census)—a commonly used and highly respected measure of occupational status. In particular, universities should require all job candidates to list their parents' or guardians' occupations and highest educational attainments on the applications. Parental occupation should be ranked according to NPT. The resultant NPT scores and information about parental schooling would be used to ensure that more people with parents of lower SES are hired as professors, thereby increasing class diversity among faculty. (For more discussion on using social-class-of-origin criteria

to increase SES diversity within the professoriate, see Oldfield & Conant, 2001.)

It is also important to refute those who argue that SESAA programs are perhaps unworkable because *SES* is too hard, if not impossible, to define (see, e.g., Malamud, 1996). Besides being a red herring, this argument fails on several additional counts. For one, it implies that other affirmative action plans are acceptable because their primary criteria, usually race and gender, are clearly definable. As Kahlenberg (1996) notes, race is fluid. To wit, he explains, (a) "Today between 75 percent and 90 percent of 'blacks' are of mixed racial heritage" (p. 283, citing Wright) and (b) "Between 21 percent and 31 percent of the genes of black people are white" (p. 283, citing Davis). The problem of defining *race* becomes even more difficult as the number of biracial and multiracial children increases (see Kahlenberg, 1996, pp. 283-284 on this point).

Likewise, sometimes gender is difficult to identify. Consider, for instance, Richard Raskind, a man who had surgery to become Renee Richards—a *woman* (Richards, 1983). Later, it took a court order saying Renee was *female* before she could compete against women in professional tennis matches.

Hence, increases in mixed-race children and medical advancements make it harder to define *sex* and *race*. As with every bureaucratic classification, the devil is in the details. Race and gender are no different from class.

Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, those who say *class* cannot be defined ignore the most fundamental principle of administration. Namely, executive branch employees constantly interpret statutes and directives. Seldom, if ever, are laws and policy statements so precisely defined that bureaucrats can avoid using discretion in applying them.<sup>7</sup> Consider, for example, that program administrators must define *earned income* before calculating monthly retirement benefits or that school officials devise gradients to judge which students qualify for either reduced-cost or free lunches.

Likewise, school officials must decide when the weather is threatening enough to cancel classes. And so on, *ad infinitum*. Anyway, administrators *already* make countless SES-based determinations, such as who qualifies for (a) Head Start, (b) low-income housing, and (c) subsidized health care. America has a long and practical history of class-based policies, even if we do not call them that. The present project simply says that all PA programs should help students realize that *class*, however operationalized, significantly affects and is affected by executive branch operations.

Finally, it is important to see that arguing for social class equity derives from a somewhat different rationale than what commonly justifies concern for race and gender; that is, although all three groups share certain problems and associated remedies, class-based prejudice and its potential for reform are sometimes distinct. Although there is considerable overlap in the sorts of hardships all three groups face, along with how we might remedy the consequences of these deprivations, sometimes SES problems need special attention. Consider, for example, that, unlike women and minorities, the lower classes lack readily identifiable physical characteristics. Whereas some people change social classes during their lives, few alter their race or gender. This distinction makes it harder to recognize SES discrimination. By simply assuming that “everybody can make it despite their parents’ low socioeconomic status,” we legitimize unearned advantage and other forms of classism; our ideology salves the cognitive dissonance inherent in existing social arrangements.

In other words, setting aside for a moment the aforementioned problem of defining race and gender, although class prejudice is more subtle and acceptable than racial and sexual bias, this does not justify discounting its effects. Classism is commonplace—whereas most people consider it wrong to discriminate based on race or gender, few ever question, as Wayson (opening scenario) did, the social consequences of selecting poor parents, even if they are honest.

Moreover, conceivably, race and gender bias will someday disappear. Gradually, courts and legislatures have outlawed various racially and sexually discriminatory practices. Congress, for example, passed the Civil War Amendments (13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments) and many bills to ban racial bias. Likewise, courts have found numerous practices prejudicial based on race ranging from school segregation (*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 1954) to voting (*Gomillion v. Lightfoot*, 1960) to interracial marriage (*Loving et ux v. Virginia*, 1967). Meanwhile, legislatures and courts have eliminated various forms of sexual bigotry such as excluding women from publicly funded military academies, voting (19th Amendment), and owning property (Gunderson, 1998). In the 1980s, the Equal Rights Amendment fell just three states short of passage.

Contrast this history of race and gender with the fact that the Supreme Court has never recognized SES as a suspect classification, nor have the states ever voted on a Constitutional Amendment to outlaw social class discrimination, particularly the kind of prejudice Wayson’s teaching technique revealed. This absence of legal standing for class comes despite all the studies showing the harmful effects of being of lower SES.

In short, the current objective is not to quibble over thresholds that distinguish among disadvantaged groups or to argue that race and gender discrimination have or will soon vanish. Instead, it is to say that *theoretically* women and minorities *might* achieve social parity through legal recourse, whereas it seems classism will remain; as long as wealth is unequally distributed and some children start the race far behind their peers, the lower classes, by definition, will be significantly disadvantaged. Just as legislation and court orders were required to improve the conditions of women and minorities, SES-based reforms, such as SESAA, will counteract the oligarchical tendencies within the existing social system.

Ironically, classism enjoys one major advantage over race and gender discrimination. Namely, because courts and legislators have been unwilling to declare SES a suspect category, class-based relief, such as SESAA, is immune from challenge. Were SES-based reforms outlawed, inevitably this would precipitate challenges to socioeconomic bias and perhaps, someday, even inherited wealth. Thus, there is little likelihood that any SES-focused policies will be soon overturned. As Taylor (1991) noted, class-based affirmative action plans are “legally unassailable” (p. 23).

A final consideration regarding the distinction among race, class, and gender involves not seeing these three groupings as mutually exclusive; to advocate for one is not to dismiss the others’ hardships. It is not racist to support class-based reforms, nor is it classist to advocate recruiting more female and minority job applicants. Reforms that help one disadvantaged group should not be treated as a zero-sum victory for the other two. “Divide and conquer” reduces the chance of significant social gains. All three groups are equally justified in their equity claims. However, by including class-based remedies in the mix, we prevent critics from saying that the proposed changes are inherently reactionary, because they do not pursue a new equality but, instead, seek only a part of the old inequality.

## CONCLUSION

PA has been conspicuously derelict in publicizing the relationship between social class and executive branch operations. Most PA students are ill prepared to fully understand public policy development and implementation.

Tummala (1999) mentioned how some people say that challenging current social arrangements, including using SESAA, is “government

intervention” and “social engineering” (p. 496). This is ironically hypocritical. America has *always* had SESAA (see Cose, 1993; Oldfield & Conant, 2001). Only, so far, as Wayson teaches, government has intervened to protect the wealthier class’ *right* to bequeath unearned advantages on their offspring. Since its founding, the government has had Head Start for children of the wealthy classes—the overprivileged. Therefore, and by definition, it is foolish to talk about “get[ting] politics out of administration or administration out of politics” (Fry & Nigro, 1998, p. 1171). Using the bureaucracy to protect inheritances is no more interventionist than having affirmative action programs for minorities, women, and those of lower SES.

In *Lies My Teachers Told Me*, Loewen (1995) wrote about all the jingoistic propaganda included in most American high school history texts and courses. If our field does not start addressing the pervasive effects of SES on bureaucratic operations—if we do not open this “closed question”—we risk becoming the subject of Loewen’s next book: *Lies My Public Administration Teacher Told Me*.

## NOTES

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2. According to the 20th Century Fund, 1% of America’s families owns 40% of U.S. wealth, whereas the bottom 90% holds only 10% of the wealth (Martin, 1996).

3. Given the extent of white-collar crime (see, e.g., Bequai, 1978), it is better to say “*rich* but honest.”

4. When the higher social classes get such payments, they are not called *welfare* but *subsidies* or *tax expenditures*.

5. The *direction* of the distribution is mentioned to distinguish the present proposal from the Reagan administration’s emphasis on redistributing wealth upward (see, e.g., Piven & Cloward, 1982; Phillips, 1993).

6. Although the proportion of female and minority faculty has been increasing in recent years, there has been no corresponding change in the socioeconomic status backgrounds of professors; roughly the same (high) percent were raised in “professional, managerial and business” families (see, e.g., Boatsman & Antony, 1995; Oldfield & Conant, 2001; Stetar & Finkelstein, 1997).

7. Likewise, American public administrators had little trouble defining *sex* and *race* when it came to segregating African Americans in *separate but equal* accommodations or excluding women from numerous government positions, such as attending The Citadel—a state-supported military academy in South Carolina (see Mandelbaum, 1994).

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