

Overcoming Gender Inequality in Public Administration: Lessons from Our Leaders

Felbinger, Claire L. and Wendy A. Haynes, Editors. *Profiles of Outstanding Women in Public Administration*. Washington: ASPA's Section for Women in Public Administration (SWPA), The American Society of Public Administration, 2006. 151 pp. \$24.95 softcover. ISBN-0-936678-25-9.

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The public sector and policymaking spheres are not isolated from gender inequality. Women continue to be underrepresented in the government sector, including legislative and executive positions. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), 1,751 women legislators serve in the 50 states. Women hold 23.7% of state legislative seats, a ratio that has only slightly increased over the past decade.¹ The American Association of University Women (AAUW) further reports that one year out of college, women working full time earn only 80% of what their male colleagues earn.² Ten years after graduation, women fall farther behind, earning only 69% of what men earn. Controlling for hours, occupation, parenthood, and other factors normally associated with pay, college-educated women still earn less than their male peers. *Profiles of Outstanding Women in Public Administration* is a celebration of and a tribute to women that have defeated gender inequality in public administration.³ These biographical accounts, sometimes personal, sometimes professional, always extraordinary, will be appreciated by both the casual and the scholarly reader. It is a

¹ National Conference of State Legislatures, Women's Legislative Network of NCSL. <https://www.ncsl.org/programs/wln/WomenInOffice2008.htm>

² American Association of University Women (2007). *Historic Principles 1881-2007*. <http://www.aauw.org/index.cfm>.

³ The volume especially honors the work and legacy its co-editor, the late Dr. Claire Felbinger, who regrettably passed away on May 28, 2008.

welcomed opportunity for all individuals interested in exemplary women in public service to read a gendered perspective of the field.

In a brief preface, editors Claire L. Felbinger and Wendy A. Haynes declare that the book's intent is to "recount the accomplishments of women who have served in leadership positions in SWPA," the Section for Women in Public Administration of the American Society of Public Administration (ASPA). Successfully, these former SWPA chairwomen, as well as twenty notable contributors from a number of universities across the country, thoughtfully and candidly do just that. They relay research-based accounts of talented and resourceful women who resiliently and purposively traversed and triumphed over male-dominated institutional barriers.

Nancy R. Foye-Cox, a victim's advocate with the Summit County Prosecutor's Office in Akron, Ohio begins the chapters with an acclamation of nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first century female "trailblazers." These early public administrators, who dared make a difference, include former slave Harriet Ross Tubman; Elizabeth Blackwell, the first American woman admitted to medical school in 1849; and Emma Hart Willard, the first woman to publicly support public and higher education for women. Foye-Cox takes us through the civil rights movements, the Equal Pay Act, organized women's rights groups such as the National Organization for Women (NOW), and discussions of "firsts," including Julia Lathrop, the first woman appointed to head a federal agency in 1858, Mary McLeod Bethune, the first African-American woman appointed to a federal government post by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and on the local level, Teena Clifton, the first woman "city-manager" in the nation. The chapter concludes with an informative list of SWPA chairs, including their current status followed by a formidable array of references.

The subsequent nineteen chapters fill 151 pages with essays elaborating the personal and professional experiences of women from diverse backgrounds, differing public service experiences, and varied research interests. The common themes of courage, strength, perseverance, and foresight pervade the collection, in examples such as:

- the courage to surpass personal tragedy in Dorothy Olshfski's account of Willa Bruce, who, despite the loss of her husband, mother, and best friend at age forty, continued to pursue her education and received her MPA and PhD, became the Kayser Professor in the Department of Public Administration at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and was selected as representative to Minnowbrook II;
- the strength of Dr. Gwendolyn A. Williams-Bullock-Smith in Nancy Foye-Cox's portrayal of this, the ASPA's first African American president, one of two female members of the first class of twenty National Urban Fellows in 1960-1970, and COMPA's first president in 1971;
- the determination of Irene Sharp Rubin to overcome the views of a traditional Jewish family and become a leading public finance expert, written by Maria Ernita T. Joaquin;
- the perseverance that would drive Anne Swafford, in Elaine Orr's account, to become the first female acting manager for the Solid Waste Division of the City of Kansas, Missouri, a predominantly male-based unit of government;

- the foresight of Dr. Camilla (Cam) Stivers, as told by Nancy Meyer-Emerick, to embrace the women's and civil rights movements and becoming, as a divorced mother in the 1940s and 1950s, a successful professional. From a twenty-year career in community service and community health, to productive work as an academic, Dr. Stivers continues to provide a model for women (and men) in public administration; and
- the successful pursuit of civic engagement by Mary Ellen Guy in Norma M. Riccucci's profile. Guy became civically involved at a time when women's issues were lackluster, few if any women occupied the halls of academia, and the "good old boys club" was at its peak.

Through only twenty profiles, this collection manages to provide fairly comprehensive coverage of women's experiences in the field of public administration. The chapters are easy to read resources easily adaptable to the undergraduate or graduate classroom for courses in public administration, political science, ethics, and gender studies. However, although the narratives in each chapter are geared toward a broad audience, including students, practitioners, academics and the general public—anyone who is interested in exemplary female public administrators—those seeking a more complex and scholarly presentation of women's issues will not find that here. A brief account of the contributors themselves would have been advisable and meaningful as further lessons to readers from female leaders who have overcome gender inequality in public administration.

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