

## Promoting Social Justice

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JSEPA offers an innovative format for discussing social justice issues, practices, and experiences. This discussion explains social justice, its place in public administration, and the format for authors to use when submitting manuscripts to the Promoting Social Justice section of the journal.

Gloria Jean Watkins (bell hooks) once said that “privilege does not have to be negative, but we have to share our resources and take direction about how to use our privilege in ways that empower those who lack it” (hooks 1989, 87). What bell hooks articulates to us as a society is to use our privilege for good to create a socially just society, or use our privilege to maintain the status quo and continue with oppression, discrimination, and inequities. Society constantly battles between liberation and oppression as the dominant narrative and lived reality (hooks 2000). However, to become a society of true liberation for under-resourced and traditionally marginalized communities, we must first become a society obsessed with creating social justice for all. The Promoting Social Justice section of this journal is designed to reflect this need.

The Promoting Social Justice section for the *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration* (JSEPA) offers a one-of-a-kind opportunity for scholars and practitioners to engage with all issues relating and pertaining to issues of social justice. This section offers a platform for moving from words to action. Manuscripts are welcomed that reflect the obstacles and opportunities that come with operationalizing social justice. The section is a dedicated space for contributors to discuss trends (both current and past) and promising strategies. From seeing and saying something to doing something, examples of subject areas range from police brutality to environmental justice to educational inequity to economic disparities to combatting racial injustice, and more.

Voices are sought in the form of notes from the field, best practices, lessons learned, and debates, among other formats. Intended to be thought-provoking, this

section encourages innovative formats that advance dialogue. In terms of authorship, we encourage scholar-practitioner pairings. This collaboration will advance the field’s understanding of nuances and practicalities surrounding social justice. We foresee manuscripts that a) offer different perspectives on the same issue, b) engage in theory versus practice debates, c) provide case studies of justice in action, or d) offer point/counterpoint debates, among other possibilities.

### What Is Social Justice?

The concept of social justice is one that is often misunderstood and rarely defined, and it is often conflated with the idea of social equity. There is an increased need to understand policy and administrative issues through a purely social justice lens. According to the John Lewis Institute for Social Justice at Central Connecticut State University, social justice is the

communal effort dedicated to creating and sustaining a fair and equal society in which each person and all groups are valued and affirmed. It encompasses efforts to end systemic violence and racism and all systems that devalue the dignity and humanity of any person. It recognizes that the legacy of past injustices remains all around us, so therefore promotes efforts to empower individual and communal action in support of restorative justice and the full implementation of human and civil rights. Social justice imperatives also push us to create a civic space defined by universal education

and reason and dedicated to increasing democratic participation. (John Lewis Institute 2022)

This definition elucidates the concept of social justice, showing it as not only a process, but also a goal that can be realized when we operate in a society rooted in justice rather than injustice (Adams, Bell, and Griffin 2007). The process of attaining social justice should be democratic and participatory in nature, inclusive, and affirming of human agency and human capabilities for working collaboratively to create change (Adams, Bell, and Griffin 2007). For the process to be truly democratic, we must move beyond the traditional narrative of “seat at the table” and work toward creating a new table large enough to give all individuals equitable say in co-creating solutions. Further, this new table should function like musical chairs, where all the chairs stay at the table but the people occupying these seats rotate so power and relationships constantly shift and evolve. Justice is always the goal. Finally, individual values, group values, and societal values must all operate in a collective sense so justice is rooted, grounded, and ascribed in each environment.

### Why Social Justice Matters for Public Administration

The current situation in the United States and across the world is troubling if one cares about issues of justice, particularly, social justice. Politics is riddled with dog whistle politics (Haney-López 2014) and rhetoric and actions return our society to a time in which whiteness was the only identity recognized as a full citizen (Blessett et al. 2016; Starke, Heckler and Mackey 2018). At the federal and state levels, there appears to be an intentional disinvestment in organizations and institutions designed to uplift the most under-resourced and marginalized in society. This includes undocumented immigrants, BIPOC, LGTBQ, and countless others. Further, local, state, and federal actors continue to perpetuate government sponsored violence on these communities at unprecedented levels as a function of the “us” versus “them” mentality (Thomas and Wright 2021).

Currently, there is a reawakening of the moral and social conscience of America, which is something that has not been seen since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. As we wrestle with issues of women’s rights, civil rights, and basic human rights, society is calling for

a moral revival to sweep across the globe. Harkening back to the police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in 2020, which sparked global protests (Chenoweth 2020), individuals are reenergized to fight for the most marginalized and vulnerable communities in society. Individuals question the role of institutions and systems designed to benefit the “few” and disadvantage the “many.” Advocates call for systemic change, hoping for institutions and systems to be upended in the name of creating a more just society. The call demands more than just surface-level change where institutions permit murals on buildings or streets to declare their support for marginalized communities.

At the same time, the movement that started with a few scholars constantly pressuring the discipline to care about social justice has now become a fierce urgency in public administration, in both practice and scholarship. As the movement grows, more in the discipline are concerned with administrative issues from a social justice framework. Scholars are asking questions that intersect social justice with traditional administrative topics, such as budgeting, public personnel management, public-private partnerships, accountability, performance, job satisfaction, and public service motivation. Despite this uptick in scholarship, there are few safe spaces for scholars to ponder these intersections. *JSEPA* offers this space for scholars and administrators, both theoretically and practically, to ask the questions of why, how, and what the best way is to have a discipline concerned with social justice. Idealized neutrality is anything but neutral. For too long, public administration has existed in a safe space concerned with neutrality, but times are changing. The discipline must be less reactive and more proactive; it must not wait for change to happen. It must create the change by being at the forefront of the social justice movement.

### Issues Within Social Justice

Within the Promoting Social Justice section of *JSEPA*, the list of topics is long and invites nontraditional inquiry as well as other methodological tools that are more often employed by other disciplines. All issues must have a clear social justice lens with application for management, administration, policy, or law broadly defined. Furthermore, special attention is encouraged to current events, such that they are analyzed through a social justice perspective. Whether the focus is domestic, comparative, or

international, manuscripts are welcomed on topics, such as (but not limited to) the following:

- Civil Rights
- Voting Rights
- Climate Justice
- Health care and Health care Justice
- Refugee Crisis
- Racial Injustice
- Women's Rights
- LGBTQ Rights
- Income Disparities/Inequality
- Segregation
- Stereotyping
- Ageism
- Ableism and Disability Rights
- Housing and Housing Discrimination
- Algorithm Bias and Dig Data
- Critical Race Theory
- Intersectionality
- Feminist Theory
- Whiteness Theory
- Best Practices in Promoting Social Justice
- Structural and Systemic Racism
- Structural and Systemic Sexism
- Pedagogical Techniques for Teaching Social Justice in Public Administration Classrooms
- Theory Development Around Social Justice

### Length of Manuscripts

One of the innovative features of the Promoting Social Justice section is the shorter manuscript length. Submissions should be original essays that range between 3,000 to 4,000 words in total, not including references and appendices. This is roughly equivalent to 15 double-spaced pages. As with traditional manuscripts, these will be subject to double-blind peer-review. These man-

uscripts are shorter than traditional manuscripts, which allows researchers to analyze current issues from a social justice perspective in a more focused fashion. Given the abbreviated length, authors can address topics that are timely, controversial, and thought-provoking while inviting follow-up discussion and commentary. We invite your submissions.

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