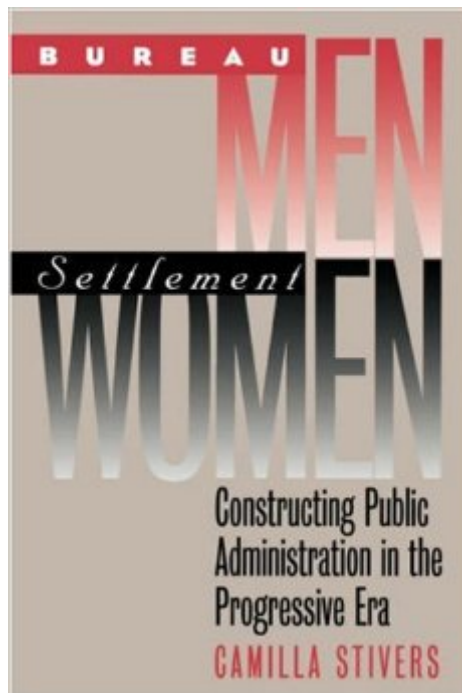


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Bureau Men, Settlement Women: Constructing Public Administration In The Progressive Era (Studies In Government & Public Policy)



Synopsis

During the first two decades of the twentieth century in cities across America, both men and women struggled for urban reform but in distinctively different ways. Adhering to gender roles of the time, men working for independent research bureaus sought to apply scientific and business practices to corrupt city governments, while women in the settlement house movement labored to improve the lives of the urban poor by testing new services and then getting governments to adopt them. Although the two intertwined at first, the contributions of these "settlement women" to the development of the administrative state have been largely lost as the new field of public administration evolved from the research bureaus and diverged from social work. Camilla Stivers now shows how public administration came to be dominated not just by science and business but also by masculinity, calling into question much that is taken for granted about the profession and creating an alternative vision of public service. *Bureau Men, Settlement Women* offers a rare look at the early intellectual history of public administration and is the only book to examine the subject from a gender perspective. It recovers the forgotten contributions of women—their engagement in public life, concern about the proper aims of government, and commitment to citizenship and community—to show that they were ultimately more successful than their male counterparts in enlarging the work and moral scope of government. Stivers's study helps explain public administration's long-standing "identity crisis" by showing why the separation of male and female roles restricted public administration to an unnecessary instrumentalism. It also provides the most detailed examination in half a century of the New York Bureau of Municipal Research and its role in the development of twentieth-century public administration. By reconsidering the origins of the field and calling for a new sense of purpose in public service, Stivers suggests that public administrators need not rigidly emulate business practices but should instead strive to improve the ways in which they deal with people. Her well-researched critique will help students and professionals better understand their calling and challenge them to reconsider how they think about, educate for, and perform government service.

Book Information

Series: Studies in Government & Public Policy

Paperback: 200 pages

Publisher: University Press of Kansas; Reprint edition (June 16, 2000)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 070061222X

ISBN-13: 978-0700612222

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.5 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (1 customer review)

Best Sellers Rank: #254,824 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #51 in Â Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Public Affairs & Policy > Communication Policy #95 in Â Books > Textbooks > Social Sciences > Political Science > Public Affairs #214 in Â Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Public Affairs & Policy > Public Affairs & Administration

Customer Reviews

It is unfortunate, as well as a reflection on similarly rationally bounded males, that I have to begin my comments on Camilla Stivers' book with the remark, "this book is not a feminist diatribe on male dominance." Dr. Stivers builds a solid historical case on how gender, gender-driven language and metaphors, a patriarchal culture, and 19th century populist reform politics helped shape the development of public administration, to its detriment. She tells the story of how the political-administrative municipal reform movement of the late 19th and early 20 centuries shifted from an outcomes-focused performance movement to a process-focused performance movement. It may have happened in any case, i.e., without the marginalization of the female intellect, but Stivers' historical account of the New York Bureau of Municipal Research provides compelling argument of the role that gender politics, both overt and covert, played in the focus of public administration on process in place of results. Reform became a "hope" that improved process would improve results. Quite apart from the feminist focus, Stivers does an excellent job of reminding us, especially those predominantly focused on the Federal Government, that the profession of public administration really begins in municipal government, long before the Federal Government employed significant numbers outside the Post Office. Her account also serves as a reminder of the excesses of market failure, laissez-faire non-governance, and the extremes of populist partisan politics that is the inevitable extension of idealist communitarianism.

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