

Reflecting Back, Looking Forward: Civil Rights and Student Affairs

By Lisa E. Wolf-Wendel, Susan B. Twombly, Kathryn Nemeth Tuttle, Kelly Ward
and Joy L. Gaston-Gayles

Published by National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, Washington,
DC 2004, 381 Pages

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Each year numerous books are published that address multicultural training strategies, theoretical models, and professional development techniques. These books are published with the primary intent of informing student affairs theory and practice. Many of these books come and go, but occasionally one is published which significantly impacts our profession and becomes a classic. *Reflecting Back, Looking Forward: Civil Rights and Student Affairs*, by Lisa E. Wolf-Wendel, Susan B. Twombly, Kathryn Nemeth Tuttle, Kelly Ward and Joy L. Gaston-Gayles, published in 2004 by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), is one such book. It is one that all student affairs practitioners need to have in their personal and professional libraries.

Student affairs professionals pride themselves on their commitment to diversity and multicultural issues. Young (2003) identified five values that frame our profession: individualism, caring, justice, community, and equality. *Reflecting Back, Looking Forward: Civil Rights and Student Affairs* provides insights from prominent student affairs leaders who share experiences which clearly reflect their commitment to these values. Furthermore, Pope, Reynolds, and Mueller (2004) and Komives and Woodard (2003) identified multicultural competence as one all student affairs professionals should possess. This book reminds us of our core values and the multicultural competencies we all should possess.

As the authors note, “the decade between 1960 and 1970 was a time when student affairs leaders were prominent and at the center of campus life, and the role student affairs administrators played in keeping the peace and in maintaining an open dialogue has not been thoroughly explored until this book” (p. vi). *Reflecting Back, Looking Forward: Civil Rights and Student Affairs* highlights historical commitments by key student affairs practitioners. Their commitments are reflected in first-person narrative stories from 18 student affairs leaders during the civil rights era. With encouragement from Gwen Dungy, NASPA Executive Director, and the recent observance of the 50th anniversary of legal censuring of segregated schools, the authors wrote this book “to preserve the rich history and to acknowledge the role of college students and their complex, partnerships, with student affairs administrators” (p.xii).

In compiling these histories, the authors spoke with each interviewee, asking them to describe experiences, roles they played in relation to civil rights issues, and, in particular, relationships with students, faculty, and other campus officials. Careful attention was given to keep the interview focused on civil rights topics and experiences, and for interviewees to discuss the institution for which they worked at that time, as many now work at different institutions. Participants were selected based on recommendations of NASPA members and the interviewees themselves.

The book's structure is divided into seven distinct sections. Part One provides the foreword, preface, and introduction to the text. The book's foreword and preface provide an overview of the intent and purpose of the text. In the introduction, the authors establish the foundation and historical content for the book. They offer an overview of the history of student affairs in relationship to race; the role of student affairs in responses to activism, segregation, and integrations concerns for student affairs administrators; the response of student affairs administrators to Black Power demands; and the inclusion of African Americans in student affairs professional organizations. This chapter lays the foundation for the next five sections, the actual 18 first-person narratives from student affairs professionals.

These narratives are organized by institutional type and geography, with the exception of the narratives of John Blackburn (University of Alabama) and Charles Witten (University of South Carolina). These narratives comprise Section Two ("Integration at Southern Universities") and are presented first, as the two individuals assisted their universities with integration. Thus, the authors note these experiences are unique and merit being presented first.

Section Three, entitled "Civil Rights at Smaller, Private Colleges," contains narratives from James W. Lyons (Haverford College), Mark W. Smith (Denison University), and Judith M. Chambers (Mount Union College). Section Four is "Civil Rights at Regional Commuter Campuses." Narratives in this section come from Augustine W. Pounds (Oakland University), James R. Appleton (Oakland University), J. Harrison Morson (Union County Community College), James J. Rhatigan (Wichita State University), Ron Beer (Kent State University), and David A. Ambler (Kent State University).

The focus of Section Five is "Civil Rights at Research Universities." Narratives are presented from Carl E. Anderson (Howard University), Philip G. Hubbard (University of Iowa), Robert H. Shaffer (University of Indiana), Harris W. Shelton (Florida State University), Jo Anne J. Trow (Oregon State University), Emily Taylor (University of Kansas), and M. Lee Upcraft (Michigan State University and Pennsylvania State University).

Section Six, consisting of two chapters, is perhaps the most stimulating section. The first chapter, "Reflecting Back: Themes from the Cases," presents themes and issues that emerged from the narratives. These issues varied by type of institution, and in this chapter the authors identify common issues, roles that these student affairs administrators were asked to play, and themes that emerged out of relationships formed. The roles that emerged were disciplinarian, counselor, educator, advocate, mediator, initiator, and

humanitarian. The chapter extensively explores the themes that emerged in terms of relationship building with students, faculty, the President, local community groups, and professional organizations such as NASPA. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the mistakes the participants feel they made.

The last chapter in this section, “Looking Forward: Lessons Learned,” provides the reader with some of the most significant learnings from the narratives. The book concludes that (a) providing access to underrepresented groups is only the first step in creating a diverse campus; (b) change must begin at the individual level; and (c) hiring personnel from different ethnic and racial backgrounds is essential.

This book can be read from cover to cover, or chapters may be read independently. Each chapter stands on its own and provides insightful information. There are a number of uses for this book for student staff, student leaders, students enrolled in graduate preparation programs, faculty teaching in graduate preparation programs, and professional staff. For student leaders in training, it could be the basis for developing a workshop on motivation. For undergraduate students enrolled in a resident assistant or student leadership class, it also could be incorporated into class assignments. For example, students could be assigned a personal narrative and asked to further research that individual. Students in a graduate preparation program could be assigned the entire book and then be asked to determine their own themes from the narratives.

Lastly, graduate preparation program faculty can incorporate any or all of this text in courses such as an introduction to student affairs. The book will help students explore the history of the profession and multicultural and diversity issues in higher education, as they develop self-awareness and knowledge, and explore campus cultures and subcultures. This book also is an excellent foundation for a professional development seminar for student affairs professionals, as it provides them with insights and guidance in handling multicultural and diversity situations on their own campuses.

Reflecting Back, Looking Forward: Civil Rights and Student Affairs captures the essence of what it was like for student affairs administrators during the civil rights era. This book conveys to the reader a message of pride and sense of humbleness from the narratives. These pioneers’ experiences offer us insight and guidance in our daily work as student affairs professionals. Offering stories that are often difficult and painful to hear, the interviewees also share situations that made them and us proud to work in student affairs.

References

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