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Robert L. Lineberry, Equality and Urban Policy: The Distribution of Municipal Services

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BOOK REVIEW

Equality and Urban Policy: The Distribution of Municipal Services. By Robert L. Lineberry. Beverly Hills, Cal.: Sage Publications, Inc., 1977. Pp. 250.

The field of public policy analysis is one of the most rapidly developing fields of interest in the social sciences. Although not a new field, it has nevertheless been given an academic and vocational "shot in the arm" by federal grant-in-aid program evaluation requirements and the increasing effort of state and local governments to maximize benefits from dollars expended. Another boost has been the developing attitude of the courts that under limited circumstances, the question of who may, or—as is more often the case—who may not, receive public goods and services is a justiciable issue under the equal protection clause of the fourteenth amendment.¹ This rise of judicial interest in municipal affairs has challenged the policy analyst to sharpen his methodological tools to determine just who is receiving *what* in the realm of public goods and services.

In his *Equality and Urban Policy: The Distribution of Municipal Services*, Robert L. Lineberry has masterfully applied the tools of the social scientist to some of the more meaningful philosophical and legal questions posed by what seems to be an overriding fact of public life: that some citizens receive more or better quality in the delivery of public goods and services than others. In his case study of San Antonio, Texas, the author reaches a number of strikingly non-conventional conclusions with respect to the distribution of public goods and services. Lineberry feels that the poor, the non-white, and those without the benefit of having "their" representative in the city's common council,² are not discriminated against in the distribution of municipal services. He notes:

Our indicators in the service areas of parks, libraries, fire stations, water and sewers, all suggested that the so-called underclass hypothesis was less closely related to

1. See, e.g., *San Antonio Independent School Dist. v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 1 (1973); *Hawkins v. Town of Shaw*, 437 F.2d 1286 (5th Cir. 1971); *Hobson v. Hansen*, 269 F. Supp. 401 (D.C.D.C. 1967). See also Gard, *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez: On Our Way to Where?*, 8 VAL. U.L. REV. 1 (1973).

2. City councilmen in San Antonio are elected on an at-large basis, a system which many argue dilutes the effective political strength of minorities.

variations in service quality than ecological attributes. Nor did the political power of neighborhoods have anything to do with the variations in the quality or location of service facilities. The overall distribution of urban service facilities in San Antonio could best be characterized as "un-patterned inequality."³

Furthermore, Lineberry argues it is not accurate to say that the "underclass" suffers disproportionately high property tax assessment when compared to the political powerful white neighborhoods.⁴

Location of facilities and support of facilities through public taxation may represent but one face of the question of inequality in municipal services. Unlike others, Lineberry has imaginatively looked into the monopolistic character of municipal services and found a second face of inequality—the fact that the underclass has less of an opportunity to exit from the municipal service system and purchase similar goods in the private sector than do their more affluent neighbors. It is quite possible, therefore, that in San Antonio and other American cities, the greater challenge lies in confronting the problem of the relationship between the quality of municipal services and the availability of similar private goods to users of public services.

There are three compelling reasons for suggesting this book to lawyers interested in the distribution of municipal services. First, the author demonstrates an unusually high level of awareness of the difficulties, both methodological and substantive, associated with the topic. Methodologically, Lineberry readily concedes that his study is of one city and that very real differences may exist in other cities. The author warns the reader of the difficulties—incompleteness of municipal records and the hazards associated with using census data generated through surrogate measures—that accompany data collection and analysis in this area. Secondly, Lineberry explores with great insight the difficulties associated with the processes of bureaucratization, monopolization of municipal services, and the implications each has for persons struggling to secure municipal services from private vendors. Finally, Chapter 3, "How to Measure Service Distribution" is an excellent introduction for lawyers to the em-

3. R. L. LINEBERRY, *EQUALITY AND URBAN POLICY: THE DISTRIBUTION OF MUNICIPAL SERVICES* 134 (1977).

4. In fact, the upper-middle class white neighborhoods of San Antonio suffered a disproportionately high property tax assessment.

pirical evidence collection and analysis dimensions of public services investigation.⁵

With a steady rise in the number and complexity of cases involving public services and fourteenth amendment claims, the public interest or municipal attorney must learn to apply and criticize social science data. This book is an aid to that end.

Richard L. Balkema*

5. Similarly for the social scientist, Chapter 2, "Equality, Public Law, and Public Services," is an excellent introduction to some of the legal problems associated with distribution of municipal services.

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