



Administrative Implementation of Civil Rights

Joseph Parker Witherspoon

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The civil rights problem of the mid-twentieth century was one of the greatest challenges to the American social fabric since the Civil War. Riots in scores of cities, and serious intergroup tensions and conflicts in thousands more, underlined the seriousness of the problem.

Administrative Implementation of Civil Rights examines the role, operation, and contribution of the device most often relied on by local and state governments for dealing with intergroup problems—the human-relations commission. First used in the early 1940s to deal with discrimination against blacks, this commission was later often charged with implementing the civil rights of other minority groups and of women, the elderly, the handicapped, and the poor. It is Joseph Parker Witherspoon's thesis that the human-relations commission was not used effectively, that an agency of this type has great strengths that most local and state governments did not utilize, and that its weaknesses are susceptible of remedy and must be eliminated. He explains these weaknesses and develops proposals for correcting them.

Witherspoon examines the roles of the local, state, and federal governments in solving this country's complicated and serious civil rights problem and demonstrates that a program that carefully coordinates action by the federal government with action by local and state governments could be made to work effectively. As a part of this demonstration he proposes the enactment of a new form of comprehensive civil rights legislation at local, state, and national levels, and presents a series of four model statutes—the Alpha Model Acts—for effectuating his proposals. The approach emphasized in these statutes greatly strengthens the role of the human-relations commission as a law-enforcement agency and, in particular, focuses the operation of federal and state action upon life in the individual community.

The book concludes with a group of appendices listing all state and many local commissions and agencies handling human-relations problems at that time, and summarizing the type of authority, the jurisdiction, the operating budget, and the legislative basis for each. This list will be of interest to those studying the history of civil rights and public policy in the United States.

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