



The Lives of Campus Custodians: Insights into Corporatization and Civic Disengagement in the Academy

Peter M. Magolda

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This unique study uncovers the lives and working conditions of a group of individuals who are usually rendered invisible on college campuses--the custodians who daily clean the offices, residence halls, bathrooms and public spaces. In doing so it also reveals universities' equally invisible practices that frequently contradict their espoused values of inclusion and equity, and their profession that those on the margins are important members of the campus community.

This vivid ethnography is the fruit of the year's fieldwork that Peter Magolda's undertook at two universities. His purpose was to shine a light on a subculture that neither decision-makers nor campus community members know very much about, let alone understand the motivations and aspirations of those who perform this work; and to pose fundamental questions about the moral implications of the corporatization of higher education and its impact on its lowest paid and most vulnerable employees.

Working alongside and learning about the lives of over thirty janitorial staff, Peter Magolda becomes privy to acts of courage, resilience, and inspiration, as well as witness to their work ethic, and to instances of intolerance, inequity, and injustices. We learn the stories of remarkable people, and about their daily concerns, their fears and contributions.

Peter Magolda raises such questions as: Does the academy still believe wisdom is exclusive to particular professions or classes of people? Are universities really inclusive? Is addressing service workers' concerns part of the mission of higher education? If universities profess to value education, why make it difficult for those on the margins, such as custodians, to "get educated."

The book concludes with the research participants' and the author's reflections about ways that colleges can improve the lives of those whose underpaid and unremarked labor is so essential to the smooth running of their campuses.

Appendices provide information about the research methodology and methods, as well as a discussion of the influence of corporate managerialism on ethnographic research.

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