Black Contributions to Social Welfare & Social Work History

Historical Efforts to Address Anti-Blackness and Racism in the Profession of Social Work

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Outline

1 Our Past

2 Black Social Work

3 Black Social Work Thought

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Our Past
Before We Start

A few comments

1. This presentation is a review of Black social work history
2. Discussion of how I have incorporated it into my anti-racism work
3. I use a critical historical view of social work’s history
4. Statements and points I highlight are towards the profession in general
5. Not all authors of texts hold same views
My Research Guide

Black Contributions to Mutual Aid, Social Welfare, and Social Work History

• Started guide in my doctoral history of social work class
• Revised as I read through texts and did further searches
• Resources freely available through library, interlibrary loan, HathiTrust, and Internet Archive
• Older books purchased cheap from used book stores
• Shared on Prof2Prof and Twitter (@JustinSHarty)
This history is devalued and omitted by dominant Eurocentric social work

Skipping over Black Social Work History

It is indeed peculiar to find that although most histories of social work go back to the English Poor Law, they skip over the helping tradition of blacks during slavery, the Underground Railroad movement, the abolitionist movement, and even the Freedmen’s Bureau, which was the first massive governmental effort at caregiving. (Martin and Martin, 1985, p. 7)

The Need to Document Black Social Work History

This textbook [Ross, 1978] was devised and developed as a corrective for omissions and deficiencies in the existing literature on social welfare, and especially by the absence of any extensive body of materials illustrative of the black heritage and experience in this area of knowledge (Martin and Martin, 1985, p. 7)
Is social work a caring and helping profession to all?

- Historical evidence suggests not for Black people
- Racism in social work has historically affected our...
  - Practice
  - Employment
  - Education
  - Research

Dominelli, 1989.

An uncaring profession? An examination of racism in social work
Lena Dominelli

Abstract Social work purports to be a caring profession aimed at meeting the needs of its clients. But is this the case for black people? Whether they enter the social work arena as clients, employees, or students, black people experience negative treatment. They are unable to express their needs in a way that is accepted in social work institutions. The subtle dynamics of personal, institutional, and cultural racism prevent the necesary interaction of social work policies and practices from being effective.

Social work purports to be the profession that cares for the welfare of its clients and expects to meet their material and emotional needs (Compton and Gulliver 1975). To what extent can black people, i.e., people of Afro-Caribbean and Asian origins, expect this to be the case for them and their needs when they approach the personal social services or come into contact with the criminal justice system? This paper considers this question in terms of the services white social workers working in predominantly white institutions provide for black clients, the position of black social workers as employees, and training provision for black students. Unfortunately, the answer to this question is that white practitioners, educators, and their departments have not been the interest of black populations badly (ADD/CRE 1978); Taylor 1981; Rooney 1980; Small 1984; Sewell 1985; Devine 1983; Tyler 1980; Dominelli 1980; Williams 1987). Moreover, this situation has persisted despite various attempts which have been made to counter it since the mid-1970s (Rooney 1987). Why has social work been unable to respond

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Racist Social Work Practices

Authors cite effects of racism on service delivery in Black social work history

- Denying or restricting access to services for Black clients
- Forcing Black communities to address their own needs
- Providing low quality services in Black communities
- Offering services too expensive for Blacks to afford
- Thinking Black clients have the same needs as Whites
- Ignoring that racism affects interactions with Black clients

Dominelli, 1989; Mirelowitz, 1979; Reid-Merritt, 2010; Solomon, 1976.
Racism in Social Work Employment

Black social work research shows how racism has historically affected the profession’s ability to...

- Recruit and employ Black social workers
- Adequately training Black social workers
- Shield Black social workers from hostile work environments
- Provide Black social workers with peer supports
- Leverage their strengths as Black social workers


The employment of black social workers: from ‘ethnic sensitivity’ to anti-racism?

PAUL STUBBS

Abstract

Although the study of social work intervention in the black community has been something of a growth area, the literature has, on the whole, been guilty of two critical omissions. Firstly, it has failed to utilise the concept of racism as a central theoretical category, and secondly, it has failed to address pertinent issues in the functioning of social services departments. This article, organised around a discussion of the implementation of policies for the employment of black social workers, seeks to address these omissions by posing a number of questions about the reproduction of racism in social services departments.

The main question concerns how far black social workers aid the smooth reproduction of racism, or whether they can be a key element in the development of anti-racist strategies and practices. The suggestion is that this is a theoretically and empirically open question. The article seeks to address these issues on the basis of research carried out between October 1983 and April 1984 in connection with a PhD research project, in the social services departments of two Inner London boroughs which I shall term ‘Aveborough’ and ‘Beetborough’. The text includes quotes gathered from taped interviews.

Authors show how racism within social work education has historically contributed to...

- Segregation in campus housing, eating, and study
- Social work coursework and teachings distanced from the Black community
- Social work courses on Blacks issues perceived as discriminatory against White students
- Few scholarships or funding support for Black social work students
- Difficulties in Black professors obtaining tenure in schools of social work

Longres, 1972; Schiele, 2007; Solomon, 1976.
The ways in racism historically permeated social work research is evident in...

- The belief that Blacks are nonrational and nonscientific
- The idea that Blacks cannot be detached and objective
- The view that Blacks are incapable of conducting research

Historical research reflects difficulties Black social work researchers faced...

- Limited research opportunities and funding
- Barriers to participating in research, review, editorial boards
- Few opportunity to publish their work in journals and books

Addressing Racism in Social Work

**Historical texts highlight attempts to address racism in social work such as...**

- **1967 National Association of Black Social Workers**
  - 1968 walkout at National Conference on Social Welfare
  - Ignites Black social worker’s challenge to address racism in the profession

- **1970 CSWE Black Task Force**
  - Tasked with developing Black curricular content and increasing Black enrollment
  - 1973 report recommends that CSWE address pervasive and persistent racism

Bell, 2014; Brown et al., 2011; Reid-Merritt, 2010; Schiele, 2007; Trolander, 1997.
Black Social Work
Black Social Work: Separate but Equal?

- Early mainstream social work movements such as Settlement Houses and Charity Organization Societies were not focused on improving the conditions of Black people.
- Left out of White social work, Black social workers had to form separate and parallel systems of social services to ensure the welfare of Black people and communities.
- Black-focused social welfare organizations such as Black churches, women's clubs, mutual aid societies, fraternal organizations, and other voluntary associations assisted in these efforts.
- In education and research, Black social workers formed study and research groups, historically Black colleges and universities created social work programs targeting Black students, and Black scholars started Black-focused academic journals.

Black Settlement Houses were created in the absence of support for White Settlement Houses

- Frederick Douglass Center
- Trinity Mission Settlement
- Phillis Wheatley House
- South Side Settlement House
- Urban League settlement houses
- Black Caucus of Settlement Workers

Blacks formed their own charity organizations since most White COS discriminated against Blacks

- Black churches
- Homes for the elderly
- National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs
- National League for the Protection of Colored Women
- National Urban League
- Negro Welfare Association

Black Welfare Organizations

Black organizations focused on the welfare and needs of the Black community

- Universal Negro Improvement Association
- African Communities League
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
- Black YWCA and YMCA
- The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense
- Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

Harvey, 1994; Hilliard and Foundation., 2008; Moore, 1994.
HBCU Schools of Social Work (PhD)

- Fisk University
- Lincoln University in Pennsylvania
- Clark Atlanta University*
- Howard University*
- Norfolk State University*
- Morgan State University*
- Jackson State University*
- North Carolina A&T State University*

Aubrey et al., 2016; Carten, 2021.
Black Social Work Research

Black-Focused Journals and Press

- The Crisis (1910, W. E. B. Du Bois, NAACP)
- Journal of Negro History (1916, Carter G. Woodson)
- Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life (1923, NUL)
- The Negro Family in the United States (1939, E. Franklin Frazier)
- Phylon (1940, W. E. B. Du Bois)
- The Black Caucus Journal (1968, NABSW)

Carlton-LaNey, 1999; Lasch-Quinn, 1993; Schiele, 2013.
Black Social Work Thought
Related Black Movements

Black social movements → Black social work efforts

Nationalist and Integrationist ideologies converge

- Niagara Movement
- Black Freedom Movement
- Civil Rights Movement
- Afrocentric movement
- Black Power Movement
- Black Feminist Movement
- Black Social Work Movement
- Black Medical Movement

Armfield, 2014; Bell, 2014; Moore, 1994.
Preservation

Efforts by Black social workers and organizations reflect the need to preserve...

- Black identity/culture
- Family
- Children
- Communities
- Natural and human resources
- Historical sites

Brice and McLane-Davison, 2020; Cromwell, 1977; Reid-Merritt, 2010; Schiele, 2013.
Black social workers have long advocated for our professions’ commitment towards social action to include working for Black liberation

**National Association of Black Social Workers (1969)**

If it is clear that the practice of social work by blacks for blacks must operate from a new theory, then this *theory of liberation* must be fully and unquestionably developed to its fullest by those blacks. [...] Again, it would be chaotic for blacks to begin to talk of a new set of values and to then allow whites to define those values for us. (Reid-Merritt, 2010, p. 43)

Bell, 2014; Gilbert, 1974; Schiele, 2013.
Empowerment

Black empowerment tradition in history of social work

- Personal: Church and spirituality
- Black: Self-worth and racial pride
- Economic: Education, training, and employment
- Political: Voting and political participation
- Neighborhood: Collective problem solving
- Community: Resistance and agency
- Client: Leveraging strengths and supports

Armfield, 2014; Carlton-LaNey, 2001; DeLoach McCutcheon, 2019; Gilbert, 1974; M. Graham, 2004; Howard, 2017; Solomon, 1976.
Abolition movements for civil equality provide foundation for social work advocacy...

- Free African Society (1787)
- Conference on the Status of the Negro in the United States (1909)

Early Black social workers and the like worked towards the abolition of...

- Slavery, legal racism, racial oppression, racial segregation, etc.

Studies found conflicts between Afrocentricity and Eurocentrically oriented social work theories, paradigms, and models that...

- Drive practice, teaching, and research on Black people
- Are not reflective of the realities of Black Americans
- Ignore sociocultural uniqueness of people of African ancestry
- Are adapted to address Black issues in Black neighborhoods
- Fail to address distinctive liberation needs of Black people
- Perpetuate racism in human services and related fields
- Enforce adoption of Eurocentric cultural values and practices

Black Social Work Leaders
Some Researchers of Black Social Welfare/Work

- Iris Carlton-LaNey
- Jerome H. Schiele
- Tricia B. Bent-Goodley
- Denise McLane-Davison
- Wilma Peebles-Wilkins
- Robenia B. Gary
- Lawrence E. Gary

- Mekada Graham
- Garland L. Jaggers
- Audreye E. Johnson
- Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn
- Joyce M. Bell
- Elmer P. Martin
- Joanne M. Martin
Some of the Many Black Social Work Leaders

- Eugene Kinckle Jones
- George Edmund Haynes
- E. Franklin Frazier
- Carter G. Woodson
- Lucy Diggs Slowe
- Inabel Burns Lindsay
- Sarah Collins Fernandis
- Forrester Blanchard Washington

- Birdye Henrietta Haynes
- Whitney M. Young
- Willie Gertrude Brown
- Phillis Wheatley
- William Boyd Allison Davis
- William Still
- Ada S. McKinley
- Maggie Lena Walker

For historical contributions of Black Social workers, see Presentation titled Dr. Iris Carlton-LaNey Presents on the Contributions of Black Icons (CSWE – February 19, 2021) on YouTube.
Our Future
How Will We Change History?

What will you do to ensure a more complete social work history? Here are some suggestions...

1. Incorporate Black social welfare and social work history into social work curriculum and doctoral comprehensive exams
2. Interview and document the history of contemporary Black social work scholars, community members, and organizations so they are not lost to omissions in history
3. Ensure books on Black social work history are in social work libraries
4. Purchase access to historical and contemporary journals targeting issues of Black people
5. Cultivate archives focused on local Black social work contributions
6. Reclaim and redefine Black history that is actually Black social work history and understand it as simply social work history
7. Collaborate with Indigenous and communities of color to incorporate their social work history and replicate the efforts proposed for Black social work history
How Will I Change History?

- Incorporate Black social work history into my curriculum
- Leverage this historical research to dismantle racism in our profession
- Begin conducting research on contemporary Black social workers
- CSWE Educator|Resource (July 2021 release)
- Social Welfare History Group (CSWE Track) expanded bibliography
How Are Others Changing History?

Here are some amazing presentations on Black social workers

• Drs. Iris Carlton-LaNey & Tanya Smith Brice
  ○ Dr. Iris Carlton-LaNey Presents on the Contributions of Black Icons (with Tanya Smith Brice, CSWE). Available on YouTube

• Drs. Jerome H. Schiele, Joshua Kirven, Sean Joe, & Martell L. Teasley

• Dr. Denise McLane-Davison & Mr. Garland Jaggers
  ○ Black Power, Black Liberation Social Work: Back to the Beginning of the National Association of Black Social Workers (Shimon Cohen’s Doin’ The Work Podcast). Podcast available on many platforms
I want to thank the following people in helping me understand the importance of Black social welfare and social work history

- Researchers of Black social welfare and social work history
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- CSWE Minority Fellowship Program
  - Dr. Duy Nguyen, MFP team, fellows, & alumni
Thank You!

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References II


