



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 28
Issue 2 June

Article 15

June 2001

Review of *Social Work Education: Its Origins in Europe*. Katherine Kendall. *Creating a New Profession: The Beginnings of Social Work Education in the United States*. Leslie Leighninger. Reviewed by James Midgley

James Midgley
University of California, Berkeley

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

Midgley, James (2001) "Review of *Social Work Education: Its Origins in Europe*. Katherine Kendall. *Creating a New Profession: The Beginnings of Social Work Education in the United States*. Leslie Leighninger. Reviewed by James Midgley," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 28: Iss. 2, Article 15.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15453/0191-5096.2733>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol28/iss2/15>

This Book Review is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

sociology as fields of scholarly inquiry. Some of the information is clearly out of date and not well integrated with important literature on schooling. The most salient quote from the book that seems to capture its thematic essence consistent with the literature on school change, reform and the plight of the urban poor is provided by Mitchell, Torres, & McClafferty at the end of Chapter 10 who state:

Much of the cyclical nature of school reform has to do with our need to address, but never to address at a very deep level, the inherent contradictions in capitalist democratic society in which we talk about equality but have social systems that are geared fundamentally around issues of inequality (p.312).

Chad D. Ellett
Louisiana State University

Katherine Kendall, *Social Work Education: Its Origins in Europe*. Alexandria, Council on Social Work Education, 2000. \$21.95 papercover; Leslie Leighninger, *Creating a New Profession: The Beginnings of Social Work Education in the United States*. Alexandria, Council on Social Work Education, 2000. \$18.95 papercover.

The telling of history is more than the chronological enumeration of events; it involves the interpretation of these events and the construction of a coherent explanation of why particular events occurred and how they evolved over time. Both books reviewed here successfully transcend the narrative style of many previous histories of the evolution of the social work profession, and offer novel perspectives that make a significant contribution to the literature. Kendall's contribution lies in documenting and explaining the history of social work in Europe and elsewhere. Leighninger's contribution has resulted in the compilation of an excellent anthology of excerpts from the writings of some of social work's founders. Both books are readable, engaging and important!

Katherine Kendall's contribution to fostering an awareness of international developments in social work and social welfare among social workers in the United States has been widely recognized. She has long been viewed as a leader in international social

work. She has sought to demonstrate to colleagues the importance of understanding international developments and of transcending a preoccupation with domestic concerns. Her legacy finds expression in the ways many more social workers today take it for granted that their daily professional lives are inextricably linked to global events. Her professional commitments and numerous publications have fostered the integration of local, national and international perspectives in the profession.

Kendall's new book was published in the year she and her many friends celebrated her 90th birthday. The book is not only a remarkable achievement for a 90 year old—it is an major achievement for an author of any age. As noted earlier, it transcends the tendency to offer descriptive narratives and instead, draws on her own perspective to provide many new insights into the evolution of social work in Europe. For example, it is not well known in the United States that the first professional school of social work was, in fact, established in Amsterdam in 1899—several years before similar schools were created in Chicago, London and New York. (The Charity Organization Society in New York had previously operated a summer program but it was not until 1904 that this program evolved into a propriety school). Nor is widely known that the oldest school of social work in the developing world was established in Santiago in Chile in 1925—many years before social work education in the United States fully took hold.

However, the book contains much more than interesting facts. Kendall's analysis of the people and forces at work in the evolution of social work is highly original. While the role of Settlements and Charity Organization Society is given appropriate emphasis, she shows how the ideas of John Ruskin influenced the founders of social work both in the COS and Settlements. Ruskin's anti-modernism offered a interpretation of social need that fostered a combination of romantic, communitarian and religious beliefs which significantly shaped the profession's meliorative mission and continues to exert influence today. On the other hand, the efforts of the Fabians to link social work with organized political action at the highest level did not endure. Although social workers including Clement Attlee, Jane Addams, Harry Hopkins and others did engage the political process, social work does not influence political decision making to the same extent today. The

recent U.S. elections may offer an opportunity to reinvigorate social work's historic involvement in politics. Not only were several social workers newly elected to Congress but the presence of a greater number of women in the Senate may prove helpful to the profession.

Leighninger's collection of excerpts from the writings of some of the profession's founders is equally interesting. The excerpts, which are brief but pointed, are nicely organized under a series of headings that deal, in turn, with the beginnings of social work training in the 1890s, the creation of the first social work schools around the turn of the century, the relationship between the schools and the emerging profession, and the characteristics of social work education by the time of the first World War. Leighninger is one of only a handful of historians to have documented the efforts of African Americans to promote social work education at the historically black universities. The inclusion of content on this topic is an important and welcome addition to the literature. By letting the founders of social speak to us many decades later, her collection is both poignant and important. Many of the people social work students will hear about in introductory lectures are included. Edith Abbot, Edward Devine, Mary Richmond, Zilpha Smith and yes, the infamous Abraham Flexner, come alive. Like Kendall's book, this excellent collection is essential reading not only for students, educators and practitioners, but for anyone interested in how the social work profession emerged and evolved in the early decades of the 20th century.

James Midgley

University of California at Berkeley