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Social Workers, Immigrants, and Historians:
A Re-examination

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I. Introduction

As a profession frequently caught in a "middleman" role between society at large and specific client groups, social work is often charged with adjusting client behavior to societal demands, rather than working from the other end of the continuum. In terms of their relations with ethnic and minority groups, social workers are sometimes pictured as representatives of a dominant, white Protestant culture, acting, intentionally or unintentionally, as standard bearers for that culture among dissident minority groups. In light of this picture, the addition of courses like "Black [or Chicano] Culture and American Social Work" to the social work curriculum appears not as a radical change in social work education, but more like instruction in foreign dialects for the aspiring missionary. After all, one can argue, American social work was born at the time of a huge influx of immigration to the U. S. and shortly came to play a leading role in the Americanization of the problematic "new immigrant."

While the above picture has its attractions, particularly as a counterbalance to the notion of social workers as strictly objective and humanitarian creatures, there are, of course, flaws in its construction. The image of social worker as Americanizer of immigrants is frequently used as an example in the discussion of social work's identification with a white, middle class status quo. Yet this image, while made much of by historians like Oscar Handlin¹ and Richard Hofstadter,² is only, at best, partially correct. A close examination of American social workers' relations with immigrant groups at the turn-of-the-century does not reveal a dominant missionary response, but rather a number of different, sometimes overlapping schools of thought regarding the place of immigrants in American life. These reactions ranged from a call for immigration restriction, through a concern for the maintenance of "social harmony" in American communities, to an emphasis on the advantages of cultural pluralism. Further analysis of these various responses to immigration could be profitable in the general discussion of social work's current roles vis a vis various minority groups and the broader society. A look into past actions may well offer a number of models for current social work philosophy and practice.

II. The New Immigrants and the Progressive Setting

Before preceding to this analysis, we should make clear the nature of the "new" immigrant groups and the prevailing social

conditions of the America to which they came, recognizing particularly the differences between this stage of immigration and the more generally acceptable immigration which preceded it in the early and mid-1800's. American reactions to immigration in the period 1900 to 1914 can best be understood through a dual examination of the specific characteristics of these particular immigrant groups and of the economic and social conditions of America in the Progressive era.

At the beginning of this century, the United States witnessed the greatest influx of European immigration in its history. This unprecedented flow, originating largely from Southern and Eastern Europe, numbered well into the millions, and by 1910 the foreign-born constituted 14½ per cent of the American population. Certain factors about the "new" immigrants distinguished them from their Northwestern European predecessors. Fifty per cent of those employed were classified as unskilled laborers, and a third of the newcomers were illiterate.³ Often uprooted peasants, the new immigrants came with little experience in the process of representative government. Crowding into slum neighborhoods in American cities, straining the facilities of the existing health and welfare services, and posing a potential job-market threat to native-born workers, the new immigrants came to be defined as a problem population, by social reformers concerned with the character of life in industrial America.

The social, economic, and political climate of early Twentieth Century America affected reactions of native-born citizens toward newcomers. While earlier immigrants had come to the land of an expanding frontier, those arriving in the Progressive years found a country deeply involved in a struggle with the problems of urbanization, industrialism, and organized monopoly capitalism. Those changes which had begun taking place in American life in the late 1800's had by the turn-of-the-century fostered the development of a polarization of social groups and a feeling of displacement on the part of the middle class. The rapid growth of the capitalist system had brought with it the development of a new industrial power elite, a gradually organizing urban labor class, and a more politically-aware generation of farmers. Viewed in the context of a growing collectivism on the part of business, labor, and farming interests, the concept of individual free will, prominent in the previous century, soon began to appear outdated. In addition, the serious financial depression of 1893 left a legacy of doubt regarding the effectiveness of the free enterprise system.⁴

A symbol of the changes and problems of the times was the American city and its growing slums. The poor, both native and foreign-born, crowded into the tenements on N. Y.'s Mulberry Street or the wooden shacks surrounding the Chicago

stock yards. Here also one found the peculiar American institution of the ward boss, that political figure who gained his power not only from immigrants and other poor, but also from the wealthier classes in urban society.⁵ The tie between immigrants, political bosses, and businessmen seemed yet another reminder of the growing powerlessness of the middle class city dwellers caught between them.

Responses to these changes in American life included two major, and sometimes overlapping approaches. Both approaches were to affect reactions toward the immigrant. The first response was a strengthening of nativist thought, based on the Social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner. The second was an increasing emphasis on economic, social, and political reform, often seen as embodied in the figures of Teddy Roosevelt and other founders of the Progressive Party. Historians have lately debated the sources of the reform movement, some seeing it primarily as the expression of a displaced middle class, others as the attempts of American businessmen and professionals to "achieve the rationalization of business through government regulation."⁶ Whether indeed there existed one distinct source of reform, or whether a number of different groups felt it necessary to promote changes in the existing system, the fact remains that a good deal of political upheaval characterized the beginning years of the century. Moreover, the situation of the poverty-stricken, unskilled, and uneducated immigrant was to occupy a significant place in reformist, as well as nativist thinking.

As in part a representative of middle class and business interests in American society, the social worker of the Progressive period reflected this interest in the immigrant. In addition, social workers, perhaps more than any other group of the time, came face to face with the difficulties accompanying the new immigration. From their experiences as settlement house residents in tenement districts and as "friendly visitors" in the homes of the poor, social workers gained a first hand picture of the effects of immigration upon the immigrants themselves and upon the society into which they entered. An orientation toward both immigrant groups and the American middle class, afforded social workers a certain potential; their attitudes and actions could have an influence not only upon the lives of the immigrants but also upon the reception of the newcomers by the American public.

How then, did social workers react to the increasing flow of immigration? How understanding were they of the foreigner's problems, and how receptive to popular nativist characterizations of the alien as an inferior being? What role, or roles, did social workers play in reaction to this vast influx of ill-prepared peoples into the industrialized America of the early 1900's?

III. Recent Historiography

Several important historians of the Progressive era have painted a negative picture in answer to these questions. Richard Hofstadter, who expounded the thesis that particularly in politics, a wide gulf existed between reformers and immigrants, had little difficulty in extending this thesis to social workers and immigrants. "More often than not," he suggested, the immigrant "rebuffed the settlement worker or agent of Americanization, and looked elsewhere for primary contacts with American political and civic life."⁷ Far more damning than Hofstadter's discussion of differences in political attitudes and style, however, is Oscar Handlin's indictment of most Progressive era social workers as Americanization agents either critical or ignorant of the immigrant's past.

Anticipating Hofstadter's "gulf" theme, Handlin found the progressive movement lacking in channels of communication with the foreign-born. Criticizing reformers for seldom, if ever, pausing "to consider ... the needs and interests of a new citizen," Handlin paid particular attention to what he saw as the failures of the social worker. Although noting that "a few dedicated social workers, mostly women, learned to understand the values in the immigrants' own lives," Handlin saw these as rare exceptions.⁸ More generally, "the sociologists and social workers who started out to do good for the immigrant, ended up by hating him because he would not allow good to be done him."⁹ Social settlements, even with the best intentions, could not help implying to the immigrant that his old customs were inferior to American ways. Thus Handlin portrayed social workers as

...made ruthless in the disregard of [the immigrant's] sentiments by the certainty of their own benevolent intentions. Confident of their personal and social superiority and armed with the ideology of the sociologists who had trained them, the emissaries of the public and private agencies were bent on improving the immigrant to a point where he could no longer recognize himself.¹⁰

Recent historians, notably John Higham and Allen Davis,¹¹ have begun to question this interpretation. Higham particularly has emphasized the contributions of the social settlement movement in building an awareness of the immigrant's potential. "Of all old-stock Americans," Higham notes, "settlement workers gained the fullest understanding...and respect for the new immigration."¹² It was essentially to test Higham's assertions about the settlement workers, and to assess the strengths of similar stances among charity workers, that the present study was carried out. A systematic investigation

of the varying attitudes of social workers toward the new immigrants in the period 1900 to 1914 was undertaken.¹³ What has emerged from this study is not a unified social work approach toward the newcomers, either positive or negative, but rather a whole range of responses, representing different, though sometimes overlapping schools of thought. The following will constitute a brief summary of each approach, shown primarily through the ideas of a major spokesman for each point of view. An attempt will also be made to assess the strength of each response among Progressive social workers as a whole.

IV. Edward T. Devine: Immigration Restriction Based on Economic Reasons

The menace of immigration lies ... in the well-trodden highway which leads from the low-standard laborers of Southern Europe to the lower margin of American industry.¹⁴

To some social workers of the Progressive era, the new immigration seemed to bring with it economic problems which made immigration restriction a necessity. One influential social worker particularly concerned about the economic and charity relief aspects of immigration was Edward T. Devine, General Secretary of the Charity Organization Society of N.Y.C. (1896-1910) and Director of the N.Y. School of Philanthropy. A student of economist Simon N. Patten, and an advocate of trade unionism, Devine was alarmed by what he saw as the immigrant's potential for lowering American standards of living and wages. In addition, Devine feared that the influx of cheap labor would retard industrial progress by holding back the invention of new labor-saving machinery. Part of the difficulty, he felt, lay in the backgrounds of the newcomers. The new immigrant followed a path already marked out by the friends and neighbors who had gone before, and thus had "rather less than the average initiative, independence, and courage, the qualities which are so predominant in the original settlers of a new country."¹⁵

Neither the dispensing nor the withholding of charitable relief could solve the problem. On one hand, Devine cautioned, it was not reasonable for the aged or infirm immigrant to expect

quite the same degree of tenderness and consideration for him as he might have experienced in a similar ... fate in the home of his ancestors.

On the other hand, "it is not by withholding relief from individuals ... that the evil consequences of unrestricted

immigration are to be met." Social workers bore some responsibility to the new immigrants, and needed to grapple with those causes of dependence and intolerable living conditions "beyond the control of the individuals whom they ... too often destroy."¹⁶

Devine saw the solution in the enactment of restriction laws. In addition, some plan of systematic distribution of immigrants to small towns and rural areas could be set up to counteract the tendency of immigrants to gravitate to large cities. Effective restriction and distribution of immigrants would help deal with the problems of newcomers as well as maintain the American standard of living.¹⁷

Devine's concern about the economic consequences of immigration appears to have received relatively little attention from the majority of his fellow practitioners, although varieties of this concern did crop up, particularly in charity worker circles. At the New York State Conference of Charities and Corrections in 1900, for example, the meeting's President regretted that the "vigorous immigrant" soon passed on to the American West, while many of the "debilitated and destitute" remained in N. Y., a "burden on its citizens."¹⁸ At the 1905 National Conference of Charities and Correction, an economist warned of the negative affect of immigration upon wage levels, and called for immigration restriction. Interestingly, the immigration committee of the conference did not unanimously endorse his paper.¹⁹ The potential wage threat idea was also stressed by Paul Kellogg, editor of The Survey, and Robert Hunter, an influential Chicago charity worker.²⁰ Yet while Hunter maintained a hard line on the need for restriction, Kellogg acknowledged that the newcomers brought with them ideals and cultures which might compensate for the economic problems they helped create.²¹

Although a concern for the economic consequences of immigration seems appropriate to those social workers whose main focus lay in the provision of financial aid to the poor, there is little evidence of a strong trend in this direction within the field of organized charity. The examples cited above appear to have been few and far between, and the chief criticism against the newcomers seems rather to have come from a body of social workers, numbering some charity workers among them, who identified with Anglo-Saxon values, and who practiced largely in the Boston area.

V. Robert A. Woods: Assimilation and Social Harmony

Social work has to do with the building up of a national federation among all our different racial groups, which will in reasonable degree preserve all that is valuable in the heredity and traditions of each type, but will link all types together into a universal yet coherent and distinctively American nationality.²²

Unlike the basically economic and labor-oriented concerns of men like Devine, the attitudes toward immigration expressed by Robert A. Woods were motivated by a stress on homogeneity and communal order in American life. Coming from a middle class, Scotch-Irish background, Woods attended Amherst College and Andover Seminary. After a short residence in Toynbee Hall in London, Woods set up the South End Settlement in Boston.²³ By the early 1900's, Woods had become one of the chief philosophers of the social settlement movement in America, and as such, one of his main concerns was the preservation of a social harmony in the American community.

Woods' attitudes toward immigrants in Boston's South End reflected a combination of the Brahmin, Anglo-Saxon spirit and a belief in the tightly-knit, unified community as an integral part of democratic society. Both his stress on social harmony and his Anglo-Saxonism emerge clearly in "The Neighborhood in Social Reconstruction," an article written in 1914 for the American Journal of Sociology. Here Woods urged the study of the function of the community in our society, for the "neighborhood is a still more ancient and fundamentally causative institution than the family." As a social unit, the neighborhood could provide the most vital arena in which to begin the fight for sound democratic government in America. "It is [here]," Woods wrote, "... that the reverse detachments of citizenship are to be swung into the battle of good municipal administration."²⁴

Analyzing the potential of American communities, Woods pictured the community's war against political and social ills as inspired from above, with the major attack launched by outsiders of a "better class." Since racial and religious cleavages constituted a major factor in the disorganization of American neighborhoods, Woods saw these as one of the primary focuses of that attack.²⁵ This kind of thinking is well expressed by Josiah Royce, a Boston contemporary, who spoke of

the evil due to the presence of a considerable number of not yet assimilated newcomers in most of our communities. The newcomers themselves are often a boon and welcome indeed. But their failure to be assimilated constitutes ... a source of social danger, because the community needs well-knit organization.²⁶

Immigrants, then, are useful as raw material to be assimilated. Unassimilated, they threaten the reunification of American society. Woods' talk about unity, however, seemed to overlay a deeper feeling about the inferiority of the non-Anglo-Saxon immigrant, a reaction quite consistent with, and

perhaps responsible for, his conceptualization of immigrants as outside threats to an already established whole. Reaffirming that whole, he warned of the sort of assimilation "which would be only a foreign composite, hardly nearer to American standards than were its original constituents."²⁷

Throughout Woods' writings one senses the typically Progressive belief in the past unity of American society, and the desire to return to this earlier harmony through a federation based primarily on American ideals and values. While not completely oblivious to the positive contributions which immigrants might make, Woods' appreciation of these contributions pales beside his warning against the

indifference that fails to distinguish the danger to our standards when certain types of newcomers are left to create breeding grounds for much that is incompatible with or hostile to the best values of American life.²⁸

Responding to this danger was largely the task of the social settlements. Woods saw as a major function of neighborhood centers the imparting of American standards, ideals, and national loyalty to the newcomers. Social workers should bring the incoming foreigner "in touch ... with what is uplifting in citizenship, in education, and in industry."²⁹ Although the best in race and religion were to be respected by the settlements, the ultimate goal lay always in direction of building a unified community.

The ultimate conclusion of Woods' philosophy lay in the call for immigration restriction. In his stress on working to unify disintegrating neighborhoods, he complained that "all such effort ... is made extremely difficult ... by the flooding of neighborhoods with constant streams of new immigrants."³⁰ Woods found false optimism in the notion that the U.S. could easily "develop a nation out of fifty nationalities," and in 1911 he became actively involved in Boston's Immigration Restriction League.³¹ The League had been founded in 1894 by a group of "practical-minded intellectuals from well-to-do, long established families, steeped in Boston ways...." Woods now joined in its cause, thus attempting to attack America's disunity problem "at its very roots."³²

Woods' ideas were reflected to a certain degree by other social workers, and particularly by workers in the Boston area. Those sharing his stress on an Anglo-Saxon homogeneity included fellow social workers and philanthropists Joseph Lee, Frederick Bushee, and the Robert Treat Paine family, all Brahmin New Englanders. Although criticisms of the new immigrant on a social and moral basis could be found among social workers of other U.S. cities as well, the Boston charity and

settlement movements appear to have been more influenced by this view than their counterparts in other areas.

In an extensive study of the relationships between Bostonians and immigrants, Barbara Solomon has noted the "proper New England" background of the men who dominated Boston's social service movement. Responding to a growing decline in political and social power Brahmins in general "resorted to ethnic criteria to explain the deterioration of American society...."³³ Solomon's assumption that such ideas were translated into the Boston social service movement is supported by the work of historian Arthur Mann, who said of the Boston settlement workers: "behind the inductive method lay the Christian urge to do good and an imported English class consciousness."³⁴

Among the Boston social settlements, Peabody House spoke out most strongly against the new immigrant. Concerned with the "moral elevation of the people in the community," Peabody House workers reported

This district is virtually transplanted from another order of civilization. Our foreign neighbors bring with them habits which cannot be followed in this country without danger to our standards.... the constituents of our districts [must] sink individuality in common neighborhood purposes.³⁵

These fears found reinforcement not only in Woods' South End Settlement, but in other neighborhood houses as well. A Boston Directory of Charities described the city's settlement workers as living and working together in an area "deficient in responsible and resourceful citizens." The focus of the settlement, the report continued, lay in the promotion of "all-round, personal, domestic, and neighborhood standards."³⁶

Key charity workers and philanthropists in Boston concurred in concerns about the new immigrant, warning about such dangers as sterilization of the old Yankee stock through "the proposed mixture of the hitherto unsuccessful races... of the Old World."³⁷ Charity leaders like Joseph Lee and Robert Treat Paine, along with Woods' social survey collaborator Frederick Bushee, all believed that increased immigration helped form "a race of unknown value."³⁸ The Associated Charities of Boston frequently issued public statements alluding to the social and political inadequacies of the new immigration.³⁹ Within the above criticisms, stress on communal order was intertwined with, and often overshadowed by, Anglo-Saxon chauvinism.

VI. Jane Addams: Cultural Pluralism

We have persistently ignored the political ideas of the immigrants who have successively come to

us; and in our ambition to remain Anglo-Saxon we have fallen into the Anglo-Saxon temptation of governing all peoples by one standard. We have failed to work out a democratic government which should include the experiences and hopes of all the various people among us.⁴⁰

While some social workers in other U.S. cities held views similar to the Boston Brahmin settlement workers and philanthropists, and while not all Bostonian social workers shared Woods' missionary fervor,⁴¹ the anti-immigrant Anglo-Saxon stance seems most typical of the New England area. Elsewhere, in Chicago, Cleveland, New York, and other cities, a quite different position toward immigrants was dominant in social work circles. This set of attitudes has been most readily recognized in the work of Jane Addams, who emerges as "champion of immigrants" in everyone's book, including Handlin's. What seems most important, then, after describing Addams' philosophy, is an assessment of how far-reaching this kind of approach was among social workers as a whole.

From her base at Hull House, Addams became involved in numerous Progressive reform movements. Behind her work in municipal reform, the push for tenement inspection, and the fight against child labor, lay a well-developed philosophy about the needs and potentialities of human society. This philosophy becomes particularly relevant in a study of her reactions toward immigration. A key to Addams' point of view was her perception of the inadequacy of older American institutions and ideals in meeting the new requirements of an industrial society. Unlike those who looked to a past harmony in America, Addams spoke of change, newness, and the coming of a higher civilization.

Seeing America's problems as related more to industrialization and economics than to politics, Addams argued that American institutions were in danger because the country had failed to adapt them to the conditions of industrial development. The country had also failed to utilize the promise of the new immigration.⁴² Tied to older political ideals and social concepts, Americans tended to make narrow judgments based only on past standards. By concluding that the country had come to an end of its assimilative powers, Addams asserted, "we are testing our national life by a tradition too provincial and too limited to meet its present ... cosmopolitan character."⁴³

Addams did not rule out the possibility of unity in society, but spoke of a new unity based on synthesis rather than standardization. Immigrants could play a vital part in this new synthesis. Expressing her belief in the coming of a community of brotherhood, Addams envisioned a cosmopolitanism which allowed for the appreciation of cultural differences along

with the recognition of commonalities based on the essential likenesses of men.

In action, Addams' ideas meant an emphasis on the recognition of "immigrant gifts" and a conception of the social settlement as mediator and interpreter between immigrant and larger society. Hull House's Labor Museum, set up to exhibit tools and processes used in the immigrants' countries of origin; the settlement's sponsorship of foreign language plays; and the stress on encouraging immigrant children to respect their parents' culture all attest to Addams' belief in the possibilities of cultural pluralism. "One thing seemed clear in regard to ... immigrants," she noted, "to preserve and keep whatever of value their past life contained."⁴⁴

The creation of the Labor Museum and the Hull House stage were first steps in a larger scheme, for Addams envisioned the settlement as the major link in communication between immigrants and native Americans. She charged settlement workers with the task of interpreting American life to the newcomers and offering an alternative to the exploitation and corruption so often met by the entering immigrant. At the same time, settlement workers should interpret immigrant customs and explain their contributions to the community at large. This was particularly important since "until industrial conditions in America are faced, the immigrant will continue to be blamed for conditions for which the community is responsible."⁴⁵

Thus Addams strove to allay the fear of the immigrant's threat to American democracy. In doing so, she frequently turned to the larger industrial situation for an explanation of society's ills. With such experiments as the Labor Museum, she hoped "to have made a genuine effort to find the basic experience upon which a cosmopolitan community may unite."⁴⁶

In assessing the strength of these ideas in the profession as a whole, we note that a number of prominent social workers supported Addams' general position. Mary Richmond, for example, affirmed the need for a wise and sympathetic approach toward the immigrant client, concurred in the idea of immigrant gifts, and expressed a particular concern about the rift between foreign-born parents and their Americanized children.⁴⁷ Others in the field, like family service worker Frances McLean, and philanthropists Cyrus Sulzberger and Judge Julian Mack, conveyed a similar spirit of respect for the newcomer.⁴⁸ Various Charity Organization Societies also saw the need for a new understanding of the alien.⁴⁹

The most positive statements regarding the potentialities of immigration came from the residents of the social settlements. As one settlement worker noted of his contemporaries, these workers were "among the first Americans to appreciate the cultural heritage which foreigners bring to the new country."⁵⁰ The Charities praised American neighborhood centers for their

promotion of a higher conception of the capabilities of the new immigrants.⁵¹ Later commentators have seen settlement workers as "pioneers in recognizing and appreciating the positive significance of the pluralistic nature of our culture."⁵²

Appreciation of immigrant traditions did not remain the province of settlement workers in any one city, but extended nationwide. Notable figures and settlements included Lillian Wald and Mary Simkhovitch of NYC, Mary McDowell of the University of Chicago Settlement, Graham Taylor of the Chicago Commons, Pittsburgh's Columbian Settlement, and Cleveland's Hiram House. In an attempt to translate their attitudes toward immigration into practice, these settlements set up immigrant art exhibitions, sponsored immigrant-initiated political groups, helped establish foreign-language libraries, and promoted city-wide "immigrant culture festivals." Reaching out to the larger society, these workers also made attempts to influence such organizations as schools and city park systems in order to win greater recognition of immigrants' talents and needs.⁵³ A common philosophy was the conviction that settlements should seek "to interpret the best in America to their foreign neighbors, and to cultivate for America all that these neighbors have brought to her of value."⁵⁴

VII. Grace Abbett: Immigrant Protection Work

The public unfortunately continues to be more interested in restriction than in the means by which the immigrants may be saved from individual exploitation.⁵⁵

One final aspect of social work reactions toward the new immigration should be briefly noted: the important efforts of individuals like Grace and Edith Abbett toward legal and economic protection of immigrants in America. Generally emanating from within a cultural pluralist framework, these activities were significant in their creation of new governmental structures designed to deal with the newcomers' problems.

Social surveys and first hand experience with aliens alerted social workers to the varieties of exploitation and fraud perpetrated upon immigrants by employment agencies, immigrant banks, and managers of labor camps.⁵⁶ Acting on a concern for the protection of foreigners, Grace Abbott helped found the League for the Protection of Immigrants at Hull House in 1908. Attempting to counteract "those agencies and conditions which make for the moral or financial ruin of the immigrant,"⁵⁷ the League played both an advocacy and an "information and referral" role for a number of years. Recognizing the fact that a private agency could never deal with

all the ramifications of exploitation, the League looked to the State and Federal governments for help. Through Abbott's and the League's work, Illinois laws governing employment agencies were improved, and eventually an Illinois Immigration Commission was created.⁵⁸ The need for the protection of immigrants found expression both at state and national conferences of charities and in the pages of the Charities.⁵⁹ and several other states picked up on the immigration commission idea.⁶⁰ The movement's impact was most concretely felt on the state level; lobbying for a Federal Bureau of Immigration did not meet with success.⁶¹

In discussing national immigration policies, it is difficult to measure the relative strengths of the restrictionist vs. the protectionist social work groups. Social work members of the Immigration Restriction League could claim partial credit for the later enactment of strict immigration quota laws. Yet it would be an oversight to ignore the national effects of the Abbott and Addams schools of thought. While not strong enough to counteract public support for immigration restriction in the 1920's, these groups nevertheless contributed to certain changes in public attitudes and to increased recognition of immigrant needs and attributes.. One evidence of this impact was the success of social work participation in the 1912 Progressive Party convention, which adopted by far the most positive plank on immigration of any of the three major parties.⁶²

VIII. Conclusion

Our survey of social work responses to the new immigration has thus yielded a series of reactions rather than a single dominant approach. The records of state and national social work conferences, as well as the editorial pages of journals, reveal debates between different schools of thought, rather than consensus.⁶³ In this light, we might return to the work of Oscar Handlin to question the accuracy of his presentation of a ruthless, assimilationist approach on the part of a majority of social workers. It now seems likely that Handlin generalized too broadly from an awareness of the Brahmin character of social work in the Boston area. Given the currency of the views of Addams, Abbett, Wald, and others, there would seem to be little justification for Handlin's choice of figures like Woods, Lee, and Bushee as models for the general field of social work, except for the fact that Handlin derived much of his study from an investigation of immigrant conditions in the city of Boston.

We would hope, however, to gain more from this excursion into social work's past than simply the creation of a more realistic historical picture. In looking for models and insights relevant to practice today, several themes occur to us. The first concerns present social work's lack of broadly-

based analysis and goals relating to the nature of ethnicity in American society; the second draws more specifically on the insights of Jane Addams regarding larger social structural problems.

In a perceptive analysis of assimilation in American life, Milton Gordon notes the lack of attention to "problems of social structure, theories and models of 'assimilation,' 'integration,' and 'group life,'... and long-range goals ... with respect to communal life in this country" on the part of human relations agencies in the early 60's.⁶⁴ A cursory review of recent social work literature regarding racial and ethnic groups suggests that a similar charge could be leveled at the field of social work today. Unlike Addams, Woods, and Abbott, social workers currently writing on ethnicity appear to have given little thought to what sort of over-all relationship between ethnic groups and society is desirable. What this literature generally reveals is concentration on the themes of the effects of racism, the problems of political and economic inequality, and the special needs (particularly in mental health and social services) of ethnic groups.⁶⁵ The particular strength of this literature lies in its appreciation of the important dimension of power and authority in relation to the situation of minority groups. A succinct expression of this insight is Martin Rein's statement that "the problem of race cannot be solved without a redistribution of authority, resources, and power."⁶⁶ This understanding of power in race/ethnic relationships, as well as the emphasis on desegregation, or the removal of political and economic barriers, builds upon the kind of foundation laid by Addams, Abbott, and others. Yet unlike the work of these earlier thinkers, the present proposals do not seem to fit within a broader analytical context.

Thus we find social workers from ethnic groups suggesting that their groups have the freedom to reject dominant values in American life.⁶⁷ Without denying the premise of such a suggestion, we note that it is unaccompanied by analyses of the possibility or ramifications of the pluralism of values in a given society. Gordon's assertion that cultural assimilation or general adoption of Anglo-Saxon behavior, values, and attitudes, is a fait accompli in the U.S.,⁶⁸ makes all the more necessary a discussion of how cultural pluralism might be carried out. In addition, we see repeatedly the image of an America divided into homogenous groups of "Whites" and "Non-Whites," without much attempt to make further breakdowns within these groups, or to discuss and evaluate the degree of structural pluralism, or divisions between religious and ethnic groups in terms of primary group relationships, in America today. In short, profitable discussion of the issues cannot proceed unless we make clearer our definitions and our long-range goals.

In attempting to build an over-all context for present discussions of ethnicity, we might do well to reconsider Addams' and Abnett's cultural pluralism framework. While these social workers have occasionally been falsely connected with the concept of a "Melting Pot" where all citizens meld together into a common mass, often based, as in Woods' ideas, on an Angle foundation; Addams' actual message was the conviction that different groups could maintain distinct identities and yet live together in some measure of harmony and give-and-take. Addams' pluralism called for the preservation of communal life within the context of full political and economic integration into American society. Significantly, Abnett saw the protection, or desegregation of immigrants as necessary to the building of a pluralistic democracy.

Addams' cultural pluralism carries deeper implications as well. What seems well worth bearing in mind is the stress Addams and others put both on the "commonalities" of all men, and most particularly on the nature of the social-structural problems with which all men in a given society must deal. In this sense the Addams model allows us to shift our emphasis away from individual minority groups and to sharpen our focus upon the nature of institutions in our society. Woods and Addams seem to symbolize fairly distant positions on a continuum between individual accommodation to the system and social change, and Woods' philosophy appears not incongruous with the attempts in the past decade to build compensatory programs like Headstart to "increase people's opportunities" to join in the main stream. Addams' thinking yields more disturbing questions about the nature of that main stream, and urges us to think not only about the unique contributions of different groups in our society, but also about the common, unifying economic and social problems which most segments of society may be facing.

NOTES

1. Oscar Handlin, The Uprooted (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1951).
2. Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform (N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1955).
3. E.P. Hutchinson, Immigrants and Their Children, 1850-1950 (N.Y.: Wiley, 1956), p. 2, 67.
4. Hofstadter, pp. 131-98.
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