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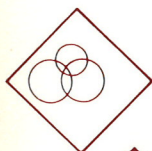
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## INTRODUCTION

This issue is devoted entirely to articles examining the history of social welfare. It did not come into being as our other Special Issues do: with a formal proposal to the Editorial Board, a Call for Papers, and other solicitations of manuscripts.

In this case, we simply became aware of an accumulation of manuscripts on historical topics. With four or five in the editorial pipeline, it seemed likely that we could publish those which were accepted in the same issue. This collective impact might give each paper more readers than it might have had individually. Then a few more arrived, and the possibility of filling an entire issue occurred to us. We added to the critical mass by delaying the publication of a few previously accepted articles and putting pressure for speedy revisions on more recently submitted manuscripts. At a panel presentation during the Annual Program Meeting of the Council on Social Work Education, I mentioned the forthcoming issue and more manuscripts appeared. Most of these did not arrive in time to be reviewed for this issue. However, this only means that you will have more social welfare history articles to look forward to in subsequent issues of *JSSW*.

I don't know whether this blossoming of productivity by social welfare historians is an accidental, one-time event or whether it is a sign of a growing movement. I don't know whether they came to us by accident or because there are insufficient outlets for historical work and the *JSSW* is recognized as a journal which has successfully filled other gaps in social welfare publishing. In any case, we are grateful for the event and proud to have been able to facilitate this important area of scholarship.

ROBERT D. LEIGHNINGER, JR.  
Editor



# TEENAGE PREGNANCY, PROFESSIONAL AGENDAS, AND PROBLEM DEFINITIONS

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*Many of the adverse consequences associated with adolescent childbearing are due to poverty and inadequate health care. Historically, definitions of the problem have emphasized individual, female culpability. Underlying social and economic factors have received less attention. For many adolescents, the early initiation of sexual activity and the failure to use birth control is associated with their perception of limited life opportunities, as well as sex role socialization inhibiting contraceptive initiative. This paper considers the role of professional groups and service advocates in defining the problem and developing policy alternatives. It examines the processes through which an issue having significant redistributive implications has been defined as one of individual female deviance.*

Adolescent pregnancy and childbearing gained prominence as a social problem in the late 1960's. Since that time, popular and political interest has grown, as evidenced by increasing media, professional and philanthropic attention, federal and state legislation, and the proliferation of local services. As a public policy issue, adolescent pregnancy appears to be caught in what Anthony Downs (1972) termed the "excited discovery stage."

There is ample reason for concern about early childbearing. The teen birth rate nearly doubled during the baby boom years, 1945 to 1957. Although the birth rate has since declined to pre-World War II levels, out-of-wedlock childbearing and abortion rates among teens have increased dramatically. Teen pregnancy and abortion rates are significantly higher than in comparable industrial nations with

similar rates of teen sexual activity. Pregnancy rates for women aged 15-17 in the U.S. are more than twice those in England, Wales and Canada, three times higher than in France and Sweden, and nearly nine times those in the Netherlands (Jones et al, 1985).

Early childbearing is associated with poor health consequences for the young mothers and their children, and diminished educational achievement, employment status and income (Hayes, 1987). Annual public welfare, food stamp and Medicaid costs attributable to adolescent childbearing have been estimated at \$16.6 billion (Burt, 1986).

As with any social problem, policy responses depend on how the problem is defined (Kingdon, 1984). Historically, the problem definitions of early out-of-wedlock childbearing have emphasized individual female culpability. Until very recently, structural factors including poverty, inadequate health care, sexism and racial discrimination have received little attention. Advocates and policymakers have implicated early childbearing as a *cause* of poverty and its associated ills, neglecting its etiology as a *consequence* of poverty. As a result, remedial policies have been adopted to change individual behavior rather than altering the social conditions which contribute to the behavior.

Efforts to diminish the adverse consequences of early childbearing through services to individuals are both necessary and appropriate. However, such services may be of limited effectiveness unless accompanied by policies addressing the underlying structural dimensions of early childbearing.

This paper considers the social problem career of adolescent pregnancy and childbearing in its historical context. It seeks to explain current policies by examining how service providers and advocates have defined the issue. In raising the issue to national prominence, advocates have been constrained by their respective professional agendas and a political process that is generally unreceptive to proposals challenging the structure of inequality.

Historically, two complementary processes have helped to shape both the definition of the problem and the policy

responses. First, groups claiming jurisdiction have sought to define the problem in ways that were consistent with their professional and organizational missions (Larson, 1977). The professional agendas of many of these groups have emphasized individual behavioral change and social control. Second, the political process itself does not normally permit challenges to prevailing social and economic arrangements. Solutions to social problems must be deemed politically and economically feasible in order to be considered (Kingdon, 1984). Problem definitions and policy proposals that pose substantial resource demands or require income redistribution rarely find a place on the national policy agenda (Bachrach and Baratz, 1970; Schattsneider, 1960).

Until the 1960's, three groups—physicians, social workers and religiously motivated maternity home operators—played an especially significant role in defining the issue and prescribing solutions for it. Their responses were shaped in part by efforts to claim jurisdiction over young unmarried mothers while establishing a basis for professional status. With some exceptions, their respective professional agendas favored interpretations that stressed individual, female culpability instead of the material context of early out-of-wedlock childbearing.

Since the 1960's, a new set of actors has become involved. They include national foundations, coalitions of local service providers, academic researchers, and advocacy groups such as Planned Parenthood, the Alan Guttmacher Institute, the Children's Defense Fund, and various right-to-life organizations. These groups have proposed new approaches such as school-based clinics, birth control advertising, sex education and chastity campaigns. Like earlier approaches, many of these initiatives fail to address the structural context of early out-of-wedlock childbearing.

#### EARLY OUT-OF-WEDLOCK CHILDBEARING IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Three conditions have been especially important in shaping responses to adolescent premarital pregnancy and



childbearing: a) the social stigma surrounding the issue that is based in part on the morality of the traditional, patriarchal family; b) the subsistence opportunities available to young women, i.e., work, marriage, parental support and financial aid; and c) the availability of contraception, abortion, and adoption. These conditions changed over time; and they differed according to the race and social class of the young woman.

### The Rescue Homes

Religiously sponsored rescue homes were among the first organized responses to out-of-wedlock childbearing. The first rescue homes in the U.S. were opened in the 1880's. Their founders viewed the homes as providing "hospitality, kindness and evangelism," (McKinley, 1980, p. 189) and "temporary homes and employment . . . for women and young girls who have led profligate lives or having been betrayed from the path of virtue are sincerely willing to reform . . ." (Wilson, 1933, p. 45). They represented the efforts of middle-class men and women to enforce the ideals of what Sheila Rothman (1978) has termed, "virtuous womanhood." Moral redemption required a complete severance of ties with the outside world, long-term residence, hard work and strict routine (McGregor, 1924, pp. 153-154).

The maternity home was considered the last resort of pregnant, unmarried young white women. (Until the post World War II era, out-of-wedlock childbearing among blacks was ignored both as a matter of public policy and private charity.) Throughout their history, the homes have served a fraction of potential clientele. For the majority, there were informal, private adoptions, and foundling hospitals where they could abandon their babies. They could also try to raise them alone, but this was a difficult task given the limited employment and child care opportunities and the stigma of unmarried parenthood.

### Progressive Era Reforms

In the Progressive era, alarm over the high death rate among children separated from their mothers at birth along

with the growing organization and professionalization of social agencies led to campaigns against "baby farms," "boot-leg babies" or private placements as the new agencies sought to extend their jurisdictions over adoptions. The U.S. Children's Bureau was established in 1912 and its first effort was aimed at reducing infant mortality, a task that necessarily involved addressing the plight of the unmarried mother and her child. Children's Bureau studies showed that about half the infants taken from their mothers at birth died. National and state conferences were organized to address the issue of illegitimacy, and a growing consensus among social work professionals held that babies and mothers should be kept together, at least for the first three to six months.

Some reformers called for general improvements in wages and living standards as well as preventive public health measures. The new public health approach was exemplified by New York City's sixty-eight Baby Health Stations. They distributed safe milk at reduced prices, provided nutritional advice and child care instruction, and made referrals to dispensaries, hospitals and social agencies. Nurses, trained at newly established nursing schools, staffed the centers (Rothman, 1978).

This community-based approach was embodied in the nation's first maternal and child health legislation, the 1921 Sheppard-Towner Act. It provided federal matching grants to the states to establish female-operated well baby clinics and to educate women about motherhood. The American Medical Association, realizing the potential of the new preventive medicine, subsequently declared pregnancy to be a "medical problem," coming within the jurisdiction of physicians. They denounced Sheppard-Towner as a "Bolshevist plot," and in 1929, succeeded in having it repealed (Rothman, 1978).

### Birth Control

The growth of the medical profession brought skirmishes between physicians and women reformers about authority over women's sexual and reproductive lives. Margaret Sanger's birth control cursade gained acceptance in the

1920's only after she altered her approach by advocating it as a health measure instead of a women's rights, free speech issue. She enlisted the cooperation of the medical profession in making birth control information and devices, primarily the pessary, available to women. Sanger had earlier advocated the Dutch approach that relied on female public health nurses to distribute diaphragms and instruct on their use. She abandoned this approach as the price for gaining the support of organized medicine. But this concession effectively guaranteed that contraception would be limited to middle-class women who saw doctors (Gordon, 1977; Rothman, 1978; Shapiro, 1985).

### Aid to Dependent Children and Stigmatized Parenthood

In theory, the federal Aid to Dependent Children program, adopted as part of the 1935 Social Security Act, made the keeping of her child a more viable option for the unmarried mother. However, due to the continuing stigma of unmarried parenthood and the demand for white adoptable babies, it remained a very limited option until after World War II.

While there was no legal prohibition against helping children born out of wedlock, the stigma was a barrier to their eligibility. Only 3.5 percent of children receiving ADC benefits during fy 1937 were with unmarried mothers. Five of the thirty states reporting accepted no children born out-of-wedlock, and another eleven states had accepted less than fifty each (Labarree, 1939). There were several apparent reasons for this low percentage, but all reflected the stigma of illegitimacy in one way or another.

Many state Mothers' Aid statutes had prohibited allowances to children born out of wedlock, and it was some time before more liberal state statutes were adopted. In addition, with limited funds available, localities informally restricted eligibility to exclude the children of unmarried mothers (Labarree, 1939). A contemporary observer noted the "extraordinary ingenuity with which some local public relief agencies are finding excuses for not granting relief to

unmarried mothers" (Brisley, 1938, p. 68). These restrictions notwithstanding, many unmarried women were reluctant to risk the public exposure that an application for assistance necessarily entailed. Although the procedures were nominally confidential, the investigations of paternity, residence, family support and employment, and review by a local board, precluded secrecy (Judge, 1951).

### Social Work and Unmarried Parenthood

The social work profession had initially emphasized the environmental components of social problems as well as their individual, psychological manifestations. This was the thrust of Mary Richmond's influential books, *Social Diagnosis* (1917) and *What is Social Casework?* (1922), both of which sought to establish a scientific basis for the emerging profession.

The professionalization of social work also provided a rationale for challenging the jurisdiction of the medical profession over family relations. One author noted that physicians too often claimed, "No unmarried mother wants to keep her baby." She suggested that this is an issue for the social worker, not the doctor, to decide since, "... the unmarried mother and her child are intensive case work problems ... and she [should] be given the same opportunity that is given to other offenders in the light of our new understanding of human behavior" (Drury, 1925, p. 41).

Social work, in its striving for a professional identity, eagerly embraced psychoanalytic theory in the 1930's and 1940's. Freudian theory provided a congenial fit with American individualism. The subsequent adoption of ego-psychology, with its emphasis on the strength of the conscious ego, reinforced the endemic social Darwinism that identified poverty and social problems as the fault of those so effected (Wilson, 1977). In contrast to Mary Richmond's *Social Diagnosis*, Virginia Robinson's 1930 book, *A Changing Psychology in Social Case Work*, denigrated the old "sociologic approach," with its concern for the environment, and maintained instead, "that all social work is mental hygiene. Case work not founded on the point of view of

personality and adjustment . . . is simply poor casework, superficial in diagnosis and blind in treatment" (Robinson, 1930, pp. 36, 48). This emphasis on the individual personality became a prevalent force within the profession and served to deflect attention from social and economic reform (Lubove, 1977). That emphasis, together with the emergence of public welfare under the Social Security Act provided the conditions for what has been described as private social welfare's disengagement from the poor (Cloward & Epstein, 1965).

In the 1940's and 1950's, a new kind of negative stereotype was applied to the young, unmarried mother. In the new formulation, the unmarried pregnant girl was not just immoral. She was neurotic. Social workers knew "from psychiatric orientation and from casework experience that most unmarried pregnancy has a neurotic base. It is frequently a symptom of unresolved love-hate parental relationships, originating in early childhood" (Sherz, 1947). Her own assessment of her situation represented a self-serving effort to deny the neurotic basis of the behavior and manipulate her would-be helpers. In blunt terms, "Most unmarried mothers are serious neurotics . . ." (Young, 1947, p. 28).

A leading text of the day, and according to its publishers, the "first book length treatment of [this] major social problem," was social worker Leontine Young's *Out of Wedlock* (1954). It became required reading in schools of social work for at least a decade, and its diagnostic and treatment prescriptions, based on an imprecise rendering of concepts of Sigmund Freud and Helen Deutsch, became the accepted orthodoxy. In this view:

. . . very few of these girls are interested in men. . . . For many, their only sexual experience seems to be the relationship which results in pregnancy, and this has usually been brief and unhappy. . . . An astonishing number of unmarried mothers meet the fathers of their babies in casual, unconventional fashion. They "pick up" a man in trains, in hotels, at dances and large parties, or they meet him on "blind dates" with casual acquaintances. . . . She is like a person in a trance who goes through all the motions but has neither awareness

nor understanding of their meaning. Hence her failure to think of self-protection. . . . Why should a girl so blind herself? What does she want so badly that she is willing to pay so high a price for it? Obviously, she wants a baby—but specifically, an out-of-wedlock baby—without a husband (Young, 1954, p. 28).

Implicit in this interpretation is a denial of female sexuality, a disregard for the role of male partners, and an assumption that pregnancy is desired. Consistent with a post World War II preoccupation with “domineering women,” Young and her contemporaries attributed the problem to improper parenting by the girl’s mother: “The great majority of unwed mothers come from homes dominated by the mother . . . a woman who has never accepted her own femininity. . .” (Young, 1954). This characterization reinforced female culpability and anticipated subsequent culture of poverty arguments.

#### UNFIT AND UNWORTHY: SECURING THE RELINQUISHMENT OF THE CHILD

If the unmarried mother was a “serious neurotic” exhibiting “delinquent behavior,” her fitness as a parent was open to question. The new psychoanalytically-oriented social worker unequivocally supported what had by then become standard practice, namely the surrendering of the baby for adoption. The babies were a valued commodity in the adoption market, and the social workers and adoption agencies served an important brokerage function.

There were two reasons cited for the young unmarried mother’s presumed unfitness to raise her child, one psychological and the other circumstantial. First, the baby was considered a byproduct of the delinquency of an immature, neurotic girl who lacked the personal prerequisites for responsible parenthood: “Our experience has shown that with rare exceptions it is the neurotic girl who keeps her child” (Scherz, 1947, p. 61). Second, the community’s disapprobation and the relative lack of community resources, including public assistance and child care, were deemed in-



surmountable obstacles to her keeping her baby. If an argument could be made that one of these two obstacles might be overcome, the two taken together were almost invariably considered as barring her raising the child (Sherz, 1947; Young, 1953).

The maternity homes were a key component in the evolving network of specialized agencies dealing with the unwed mother and her child. By the 1950's and 1960's, the more modern maternity homes reflected a peculiar mixture of therapeutic case work intervention and moral rescue. They served "essentially respectable girls who had made a mistake," never-married girls pregnant for the first time (Rains, 1970, p. 220). The major functions of the homes were concealment and the moral reinstatement of the girl through her acceptance of responsibility for her mistake. While adoption was considered in theory an open issue, in practice, one's intention to surrender was taken as a foregone conclusion. Failure to accept psychological responsibility for their pregnancies or persistence in seeking to keep the baby was viewed as "denial" (Judge, 1951; Rains, 1970).

The maternity homes began to die out in the 1960's despite the sharply rising rate and incidence of adolescent childbearing after World War II. Salvation Army officials "watched in despair as social acceptance of teenage and single-parent pregnancy, changed public morals, steeply rising costs . . . and—hardest of all to bear—abortion . . ." emptied their facilities (McKinley, 1980, p. 207).

Between 1945 and 1957, the baby boom years, there was a sharp increase in the adolescent birth rate, paralleling that for older age groups. There followed a liberalization of attitudes about sexual behavior to what had occurred in the 1920's. There were also significant developments in the technology and availability of contraception and abortion, and a shift among young white women from the relinquishment to the keeping of their babies born out of wedlock. The 1960's brought a major expansion of welfare state programs and greater governmental attention to a variety of social problems including many related to early childbearing. New programmatic interventions were developed, and

government-sponsored research yielded considerable information about the causes and consequences of adolescent pregnancy and childbearing.

### The Teenage Pregnancy Epidemic

The adolescent birth rate (15-19) in this century was relatively stable, fluctuating between about 50 to 60 per 1,000 until 1946. It then climbed from 51.5 to a high of 96.3 per 1,000 in 1957, the peak year of the baby boom (Furstenberg, 1981; Moore, 1985). The rate has declined steadily since then, reaching prewar levels in the late 1970's. Births per 1,000 females, 15-19, were 89.1 in 1960, 68.3 in 1970, 53.7 in 1977, and 52.9 in 1981 (Moore, 1985; Vinovskis, 1981).

Underlying these trends were changes in sexual behavior, attitudes and public policies. The period from 1965 to 1975, the time of the sexual revolution, was marked by a decline in abstinence codes and a much greater acceptance of sexuality for all age groups. The shift in attitudes toward a code of what Ira Riess (1980) characterized as "permissiveness with affection" is illustrated by opinion poll responses. In 1963, 80 percent of adult respondents disapproved of premarital intercourse; but by 1975, only 30 percent disapproved (Riess, 1980).

The earlier abstinence codes had been reinforced by professional practices and public policies. In limiting the availability of contraception, public policies had offered a choice between abstinence or pregnancy (Rodman et al., 1984). There was little change in the technology, availability or use of contraception from the 1930's until the early 60's when the birth control pill and IUD became available. Until then, the level of effective use provided little or no protection (Cutright, 1972a). A series of Supreme Court decisions between 1965 and 1980 struck down state laws prohibiting the dispensing and use of contraceptives and upheld minors' rights to contraceptive services (Rodman et al, 1984). Despite these changes, however, significant administrative, financial and social barriers continued to inhibit access to contraception, especially among the young.

## FROM PRIVATE CONCERN TO PUBLIC ISSUE: THE EMERGENCE OF TEEN PREGNANCY AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM

In the early 1960's, the U.S. Children's Bureau and the service constituency it fostered sought to implicate adolescent childbearing as a cause of other concerns of the day such as juvenile delinquency, poverty, illegitimacy, welfare dependency, and the "population problem." Prior to that time, teenage pregnancy and out-of-wedlock childbearing had been considered an individual, private matter. The expansion of government social programs in the 1960's and early 1970's also provided resources for the establishment of local adolescent pregnancy programs, support for advocacy groups, and money for research.

One behavioral change that had a direct bearing on subsequent policy responses was the dramatic shift among young white unmarried women from relinquishing their babies for adoption to keeping them as black women had always done. This restricted the supply of white infants available for adoption, thereby contributing to the "baby famine" (Benet, 1976). In the 1960's, about 90 percent of babies born out-of-wedlock were relinquished for adoption. By the mid-1970's, about 90 percent were kept by their mothers (Vinovskis, 1981). As Steiner (1981) observed, "As long as it was unthinkable for a visible, unwed adolescent to keep her child, neither prevention nor long-run services to mother and child got much attention even from the most compassionate policy-makers" (pp. 72-73).

The federal policy interest in adolescent pregnancy derived in part from its recognition as a problem of middle class whites. Its transition from being viewed as a black phenomenon to being perceived as more general and wide spread was accompanied by a shift in causal explanation and terminology. Early, out-of-wedlock childbearing among blacks had been attributed to inherent sociological and cultural factors such as the supposed weakness of family structures, and the alleged acceptance of illegitimacy in the black community. White illegitimacy was more prone to individualistic, psychological and moral explanations (Ladner,

1972). Now, with white adolescents keeping their babies, increasing professional concern was expressed about the health and developmental implications for the infants. Single adolescent parenthood was presumed by many to be invariably detrimental, although, as shown below, the research evidence presents different picture.

#### POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND FEDERAL LAW: THE ADOLESCENT HEALTH SERVICES AND PREGNANCY PREVENTION ACT OF 1978

In 1963, the Children's Bureau funded a demonstration project serving pregnant adolescent girls at Washington, D.C.'s Webster School. It offered prenatal care, counselling, and education, and became a prototype for subsequent efforts to establish local comprehensive service programs. By 1967, thirty-five local programs had been launched with Children's Bureau funding. The central concept involved the provision of short term health, educational and social services, usually by several different agencies.

This concern for pregnant and parenting adolescents fit within the traditional purview of the Children's Bureau and permitted the Bureau to embrace an issue of increasing public and political concern at a time when the Bureau's status was threatened by reorganization (Nelson, 1984). The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 gave new impetus to the Bureau's efforts to foster the development of local comprehensive service programs for pregnant and parenting adolescents. A number of local programs were started with Economic Opportunity Act funds and maintained with the aid of other federal anti-poverty grants in the 1960's. Interest in creating a special adolescent pregnancy program increased sharply after the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision provided constitutional protection for abortion. In 1975, during the Ford Administration, Senator Edward Kennedy introduced the School-Age Mother and Child Health Act and conducted hearings on it in his Health Subcommittee. The rationale for this and comparable bills introduced by Representative Albert H. Quie and Senator Birch Bayh was to provide "life

support" services to teenage girls and their children, and foster the preservation of life (Steiner, 1981).

### President Carter's Adolescent Pregnancy Initiative

President Carter and his Secretary of Health Education and Welfare, Joseph Califano, were both on record as opposing abortion, but were looking for some way to appease both anti-abortion and pro-choice advocates (Steiner, 1981). The Administration's legislative proposal was based on a HEW March 17, 1977 Special Task Force memorandum recommending a "Family Development Program," that would "provide practical, ethical and *politically viable alternatives to abortion* [and] verifiable improvements in family life" ("Family Development Program," March 17, 1977, p. 656). The prototype for the proposed national program was the Johns Hopkins Medical School comprehensive services center supported by the Kennedy Foundation, an approach adopted at the urging of Eunice Kennedy Shriver (Steiner, 1981).

The Adolescent Health Services and Pregnancy Prevention Act of 1978 stressed short term, coordinated services to the already pregnant, advocacy of sexual abstinence, and promotion of adoption. It was repealed under the 1981 Omnibus Reconciliation Act (OBRA) and replaced by Title XX of the Public Health Service Act. Title XX represented a retreat from the modest objectives of the 1978 law in several respects. In defining the problem as one of fragmented and uncoordinated services, it failed to address the absence of many key service components. By establishing a demonstration grant program, it institutionalized the inadequate funding levels and offered no options for the thousands of localities that could not qualify for assistance. Most importantly, it further de-emphasized family planning services. Annual appropriations for either law have never exceeded the \$13.4 million allocation for FY 1984. Altogether, fewer than 100 programs received grants between 1979 and 1984.

Even before the passage of federal legislation, a number of localities had initiated local programs. A 1976 survey identified 1,132 programs; however, only 4.8 percent, i.e. 54,

provided pre and postnatal care, education and social services (Eddinger & Forbush, 1977). A subsequent study identified 1,117 local programs of which 25 percent (274) were deemed comprehensive because they listed the ten core services identified in the 1978 Act (JRB Associates, 1981). As these surveys showed, a number of communities established programs, but few were comprehensive. This is not surprising in view of the conditions under which these programs operated.

A study of local programs found the constraints so formidable that only under exceptional circumstances could comprehensive services be sustained. The constraints included the absence of a firm funding base, an insufficient health and welfare infrastructure, negative attitudes toward a stigmatized population, and an unproven interventive technology. A gender-based division of labor further impeded access to resources. The female program staff often had difficulty in convincing male resource gate keepers of the urgency of what was commonly regarded as a female issue. When programs were established in schools, they frequently served organizational interests by removing pregnant students from the regular classrooms and isolating them in special self-contained programs for the duration of their pregnancies (Weatherley et al., 1986; Perlman & Weatherley, 1986). Evaluations of federal demonstration projects have found that while some may have improved pregnancy outcomes of some participants, they have generally been unsuccessful in reducing welfare dependency, school leaving, and repeat pregnancies, or in providing employment, all goals of these programs (Burt et al., 1984; Polit & Kahn, 1985).

## OPENING THE POLICY WINDOW

The exigencies of political agenda building demand that a social issue be perceived as a national crisis in order to gain the attention of policy decision-makers. Advocates have strong incentives to dramatize the adverse consequences of a social condition and minimize the costs and difficulty of



ameliorative efforts. As a result, policy advocates have often emphasized the dire consequences of teenage pregnancy while obscuring its etiology in poverty, racism and sexism.

Three kinds of processes have been involved in sustaining popular and official perceptions of teenage pregnancy as a crisis demanding governmental attention: a) rhetorical devices stressing the gravity of the problem and the threat it poses to the social order; b) issue expansion, whereby teen pregnancy is implicated as a cause of other recognized social problems; and c) selective utilization of empirical evidence. Rhetorical devices include the use of medical metaphors such as "epidemic" and "contagion," and labeling the issue as "a crisis." Young unmarried mothers are described as "children" and "immature," irrespective of their age, individual circumstances and maturity, and their children are referred to as "illegitimate." The dramatic rhetoric and sense of crisis it conveys, and the potential for gripping pictorial representation has made the issue an appealing subject for the media, thereby reinforcing the interest of political actors (Declercq, 1978; Vinovskis, 1981).

Beginning in the 1960's, policy advocates portrayed teenage childbearing as a cause of poverty, crime, delinquency, school drop out, unemployment, child abuse, welfare dependency, mental retardation, and a variety of health and developmental problems. The seriousness of the problem was reinforced by a selective presentation of the empirical evidence. Statistical data were reported in ways that suggested a growing problem. This was done, for example, by lumping together the 17-19 year olds who have the most children with less mature, younger girls; by reporting the increasing *numbers* of births to the baby boom cohort which was actually experiencing falling *birth rates*; and stressing rates of increase among the youngest girls, aged 10-14, from 0.8 births per 1,000 in 1966 to 1.1 in 1983, without mentioning the relatively small numbers involved—9,773 in 1982 (Levine & Adams, 1985).

Most common was the attribution to teen pregnancy of a series of dire consequences, an association based on the

ecological fallacy. There is a large body of literature documenting the ill effects and social costs of early childbearing and parenthood. However, many of these adverse consequences result not from pregnancy per se but from poverty and the unequal access to resources and services. Nonetheless, individualistic interpretations of the issue persist. This is not only because out-of-wedlock parenthood is a violation of maternity norms (Schur, 1984), but also because there is no constituency to support the redistributive policies that a structural interpretation would imply. Interest groups are constrained to put forth strategies consistent with the electoral interests of political actors.

Teenage mothers were innacurately deemed biologically too immature for safe childbearing; their high premature delivery rate was considered inevitable, unaffected by even the most comprehensive prenatal care (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1976, p. 21). They were said to be more prone to child abuse (Bolton, 1980), though empirical studies have failed to confirm this (Gelles, 1986). It was often asserted that teen pregnancy caused school leaving (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1976; Fine and Pape, 1982), though half the young mothers who have left school dropped out *before* becoming pregnant.

A *Time* magazine cover story captures the popular theme of female culpability. The article, "Children having children: Teen pregnancies are corroding America's social fabric," states:

Teen pregnancy imposes lasting hardships on two generations: parent and child. Teen mothers are, for instance, many times as likely as other women with young children to live below the poverty level. According to one study, only half of those who give birth before age 18 complete high school (as compared with 96% of those who postpone childbearing). On the average, they earn half as much money and are far more likely to be dependent on welfare: 71% of females under 30 who receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children had their first child as a teenager.

As infants, the offspring of teen mothers have high rates of illness and mortality. Later in life, they often experience educational and emotional problems. Many are victims of child abuse at the hands of parents too immature to understand

why their baby is crying or how their doll-like plaything has suddenly developed a will of its own. Finally, these children of children are prone to dropping out and becoming teenage parents themselves. According to one study, 82% of girls who give birth at age 15 or younger were daughters of teenage mothers.

With disadvantage creating disadvantage, it is no wonder that teen pregnancy is widely viewed as the very hub of the U.S. poverty cycle (*Time*, Dec. 9, 1985, p. 84).

Such interpretations notwithstanding, there is a substantial body of evidence confirming that many of the problems associated with teen pregnancy and childbearing are due to poverty, exacerbated by inadequate health and welfare services. Poor teenagers are more prone to bear children as well as drop out of school, be unemployed, receive public assistance and have health problems (Cutright, 1972b; Menken, 1972, p. 334; Osofsky & Kendall, 1973, p. 115).

More recent research has reaffirmed the links between poverty, poor health care, and the ill effects of teen pregnancy. Baldwin and Cain's review of the research (1980) led to the conclusion that the perinatal and neonatal risks of early childbearing were directly related to the quality of prenatal care. They cited a study of 9,125 births in Copenhagen, Denmark that found that the children of younger mothers, drawn from a lower socioeconomic group, actually had *lower* rates of stillbirth and neonatal mortality than the children of older, more economically secure mothers. The younger mothers and their children also had better indicators of general health. These excellent results for young women at apparently high risk were attributed to the superior system of prenatal care. Similar results were also reported in American studies when high quality prenatal care was provided.

A summary of research reviews states, "... studies from the 1960s did not isolate the affects of age from race, SES, legitimation status, etc., and concluded that by virtue of being adolescent, the mother was at high risk of poor outcome, as was her baby. . . . But adolescent mothers, even those less than 15 . . . are not at substantially greater risk" than older mothers of similar SES and race (Mc Anarney & Thiede, 1983, p. 378).

## Class and Race Dimensions of Adolescent Childbearing

Concerns about teenage illegitimacy, especially among blacks, and the attendant welfare costs have been cited among the reasons for passage of the Adolescent Health, Services, and Pregnancy Prevention and Care Act of 1978 (Vinovskis, 1981). Some of the reasons for the increased out-of-wedlock birth rates have received little attention in policy debates, however. A major factor has been the declining rate of marriage (Hayes, 1987, p. 77).

After a sharp rise in the adolescent marriage rate following World War II and continuing through the 1950's, the rate has since been steadily declining, as it has for older women. In 1960, only a third of the women between 20 and 24 had not married; by 1978, almost a half in this age group were unmarried, although in general, the declining marriage rate has been accompanied by a commensurate increase in cohabitation (Bell, 1983). Three structural factors are associated with the postponement of marriage since the 1960's: youth unemployment, prolonged high school and college education, and a skewed sex ratio reflecting a shortage of males, especially between ages 15-35. The impact of unemployment and the declining pool of available males has been particularly severe for blacks.

The percentage of men who have ever married varies directly with their income at every age and educational level. The employment picture for young people has been especially bleak since the 1960's. This is due to economic stagnation compounded by the entry of the baby boom cohort and an increasing percentage of women into the labor market. Youth unemployment rates have remained consistently high, especially for black males, even in periods of recovery.

Since men, on the average, marry women about four years younger, one effect of the baby boom was to create a 5 to 10 percent surplus of women at the age when most first marriages occur. This marriage gap was exacerbated by a higher male mortality rate. Males between the ages of 15 and 35 are especially prone to death from accidents, murder and suicide, and a substantial percentage are incarcerated. Violent death and incarceration take an especially high toll

among black males, and with the high rate of unemployment, there is a dearth of potential marriage candidates, especially among blacks (Bell, 1983).

### Premarital Sexual Activity, Contraception, and Abortion

During the 1970's, there was a substantial increase in the percentage of unmarried adolescents who were sexually active. The proportion of unmarried girls 15-19 who had ever had intercourse increased from 28 percent in 1971 to 46 percent in 1979, and then declined to 42 percent in 1982. The proportions of black girls who were sexually active during this period ranged from 13 to 31 percentage points higher than white girls (Hayes, 1987, p. 40).

Socioeconomic status is strongly associated with age at first intercourse, contraceptive use, abortion and childbearing. Using the mother's educational attainment as a measure of socioeconomic status, the lower her level of schooling, the more likely her adolescent child would become sexually active. An analysis of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth data found that 53.7 percent of those girls whose mothers had not completed high school were sexually active by age 18, compared with 34.1 percent whose mothers continued beyond high school (Hayes, 1987, p. 45).

The causes of adolescent childbearing are complex, and no single explanation can account for the variety of behaviors and circumstances involved. Middle and upper-class adolescents become pregnant as do those from impoverished backgrounds. Yet a number of studies have pointed to the associations between poverty, the early initiation of sexual activity and the failure to use contraception. As summarized in a review of the research, the following factors appear to be central:

. . . poverty, living in a one-parent family, minority group membership, low education and occupation of parents, low economic achievement and low educational-occupational goals of the young person (Chilman, forthcoming, p. 7).

The linkages between one's life circumstances and sexual and contraceptive behavior remain unclear. However, there is evidence that adolescents who perceive some benefit in

avoiding pregnancy and childbearing are more likely to do so. They tend to be those who have high aspirations and see some likelihood of achieving their life goals. Conversely, those who have low self-esteem, fatalistic attitudes and a lack of efficacy are more likely to bear children (Chilman, forthcoming; Furstenberg, 1976; Moore, et al., 1986).

## Contraception

Despite the major strides in the availability of contraception during the past twenty-five years, problems remain. Federally funded family planning services first became available under the Economic Opportunity Act in 1964, and services expanded rapidly in the early 1970's with the 1970 enactment of the Family Planning Services and Population Research Act, Title X of the Public Health Services Act. Title X initially drew support from a coalition of women's rights and population control advocates, many of whom were concerned about growing AFDC enrollment. However, Title X has since been opposed by conservatives who contend that it fosters promiscuity and erodes parental authority. With the passage of Title X, there developed a two-tier system of service delivery, with government sponsored family planning services targeted to the poor, the young and minorities, while white, middle-class women relied more on private physicians. However, with limited funding for Title X, there remains a substantial gap in available services.

An Alan Guttmacher Institute study in the mid-1970's estimated that a minimum of 1.6 million adolescents at risk were unserved by either a private physician or an organized program (Dryfoos & Heisler, 1978). There is little reason to believe this situation has improved since then. A national survey of adolescent girls confirmed this picture of family planning availability and utilization:

If we add together those who never use contraception and those who have never used medical methods, we have around 70 percent of the sexually active who are not being reached through organized services. In addition, there is the large group of young women who ultimately use medical methods,



but whose acceptance of these methods comes after an extended period of nonuse, which in many cases involves an unintended pregnancy. *In terms of their penetration of the market for teenage contraception, the nation's physicians and clinical services can reasonably be regarded as marginal suppliers* (Zelnik, Kanter and Ford, 1981, pp. 129-130, emphasis added).

While reproductive processes are "natural," they are also shaped by material and social conditions. The introduction of the birth control pill and IUD in the early 1960's shifted primary contraceptive responsibility from males to females. For young, unmarried women, the use of contraception, especially the pill, diaphragm and IUD, conflicts with strong social sanctions against being sexually assertive.

Kristin Luker (1975) put it this way: ". . . our present contraceptive technology has increasingly created an ideology that says an unwanted pregnancy is the woman's fault." She argued that the failure of many young unmarried women to contracept represents a kind of rational risk-taking where women "weigh the actual costs of contraception against a discounted risk of pregnancy" (p. 41). The costs of contraception for young unmarried women include the flaunting of taboos by planning to have sex, being sexually available and experienced.

Despite the technological shift to female contraceptive methods, Zelnik, Kanter and Ford (1981) found that 40 percent of adolescent girls who used birth control relied on male methods, the condom or withdrawal. However, adolescent males remain insufficiently concerned about their contraceptive responsibility (Chilman, forthcoming, p. 10).

## Abortion

Abortion also has played a central role in limiting the number of births to teenagers during the past fifteen years. From 1973 to 1982, the proportion of teen pregnancies terminated by abortion rose from 24 to 39 percent (Levine and Adams, 1985). The abortion rate might be even higher were it not for the 1976 Hyde amendment prohibiting federal funding for abortions (Steiner, 1981).

When one considers the differences in the availability and utilization of contraception and abortion, along with the availability of the marriage option, the class dimensions of teenage pregnancy stand out. Low income and minority girls become sexually active earlier and are much less likely to use contraception or rely on abortion than white, middle class adolescents. Zelnick, Kanter and Ford (1980) found little difference in contraceptive use between black and white teenagers when controlling for age, socioeconomic and family status, and age at first intercourse. Even before passage of the Hyde amendment, abortion was used mainly by the middle classes. The poor pregnant teenage girl is about two-fifths as likely to abort irrespective of race. Considering the effects of both marriage and abortion, Zelnick, Kanter and Ford (1981) found:

"... those in the lowest SES category were 9 times as likely to deliver illegitimate births as those in the highest category; among whites the differences are even more extreme, in that none of the women in the highest [SES] category delivered an illegitimate birth, all of their illegitimate pregnancies having been 'resolved' either by abortion or by marriage" (p. 158).

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

As a social problem, early unintended pregnancy and childbearing can be defined in different ways. It may be seen as resulting from impoverishment, restricted educational, vocational and marriage options, inadequate preparation for sexuality, lack of information and access to contraception and abortion, and social prohibitions against female birth control initiatives. The adverse consequences associated with early childbearing may also be seen as manifestations of poverty, an inadequate health care system, and the lack of public child development supports. Such interpretations call attention to the structural components of the issue and reveal ways in which individual behavior and social policy are constrained by economic inequality and racial and gender bias. They suggest the need for basic re-

forms to reduce poverty and inequality and improve access to health care, family planning and other essential services.

Historically, however, the dominant problem definitions have focused on the individual girl rather than the social context of childbearing. It has been her immorality, neurosis, or ignorance, or the lure of public support that caused her to become pregnant. Her immaturity was itself the cause of poor pregnancy and developmental outcomes. Her behavior threatened the social fabric by perpetuating the culture of poverty and spawning a host of costly social ills.

The predominance of individualistic definitions of the problem is not accidental. The prime arbiters in defining adolescent pregnancy have been the service providers, helping professionals, academics, bureaucrats and politicians who have some vested interest in the issue. Given the constraints of the political system, the policy options they promote must be acceptable to dominant interests if they are to receive serious consideration. This rules out universalistic health care, income support, and full employment policies that might alter the social context of early childbearing, especially among minorities and the poor.

Policies to promote early sexuality education, birth control information and access, and contraceptive responsibility would benefit adolescents at all income levels. While such policies are not as costly as basic welfare state reforms, they threaten patriarchal family values by appearing to sanction adolescent sexuality. A National Academy of Sciences panel concluded, "The problems of adolescent pregnancy and childbearing are solidly rooted in many of the forces and principles that shape our society—individualism, family autonomy, and free enterprise" (Hayes, 1987, p. 293).

Changing circumstances, most notably concerns about the spread of AIDS, and the efforts of both new and established advocacy groups have opened the national policy agenda to a somewhat wider range of options. There is increasing recognition of the role of poverty, racial discrimination, and sexism in early childbearing. However, many of

the more recent proposals continue to focus on individual change. Remedial education, employability training, values clarification, assertiveness training, life skills planning, and mentoring programs may be of limited benefit unless adolescents perceive that there are meaningful life options available to them. Even incremental efforts to strengthen existing family planning, income maintenance, nutritional and maternal and child health programs are most welcome, as are campaigns promoting sex education and contraception. It is not likely, however, that the rate of adolescent childbearing or the incidence of adverse health and social consequences will be significantly altered without major changes in income distribution, employment opportunities, gender roles, and health and welfare services.

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# NOT FOR POVERTY ALONE: FOSTER CARE POPULATION TRENDS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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*Trends in the size of the national foster care population from 1910 to 1983 are examined in the context of child welfare policy toward dependent and neglected children. Several major turning points in the child placement rate are identified, and the reasons for them are explored. The relationship between poverty and foster care placement is discussed, and it is concluded that the child placement rate is not related to the poverty rate, but rather, to how our society chooses to intervene with the children of families living in poverty.*

One can hardly imagine a more profound intrusion of government or society into the lives of families than the separation of children from their parents. When such separation is effected through no fault of the children, the question arises as to what conditions of the family or faults of the parents might be defined by society as rightful or necessary cause for such extreme action.

At least since the early 1900s, a strongly stated commitment and policy toward maintaining children in their own families, whenever possible, has emerged in the United States. The 1909 White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children issued the following famous conclusions:

"Home life is the highest and finest product of civilization . . . Children should not be deprived of it except for urgent and compelling reasons. Children of parents of worthy character, suffering from temporary misfortune, and children of reasonably efficient and deserving mothers who are without support of the normal breadwinner, should as a rule be kept with their parents, such aid being given as may be

necessary to maintain suitable homes for the rearing of the children . . . Except in unusual circumstances, the home should not be broken up for reasons of poverty, but only for considerations of inefficiency or immorality . . ." (in Bremner, 1971, p. 365).

This was seemingly the dawn of a new era in child welfare, in which the emphasis, in policy at least, was clearly shifting toward maintaining children in their own homes. The expressed concern that children should not be removed from their parents for reasons of poverty seemed to contrast sharply with the "child-saving" philosophy which predominated through the nineteenth century and which emphasized the "rescuing" of children from pauper families (Leiby, 1978, p. 144).

As late as 1899, the first law to establish a juvenile court, in Illinois, lumped dependency and neglect together: "(T)he words dependent child and neglected child shall mean any child who for any reason is destitute or homeless or abandoned; or dependent upon the public for support; or has not proper parental care or guardianship; or who habitually begs or receives alms; or who is found living in any house of ill fame or with any vicious or disreputable person; or whose home, by reason of neglect, cruelty or depravity on the part of its parents . . . is an unfit place for such a child . . ." (in Bremner, 1971, pp. 506-507).

This law, considered a reform because it removed child welfare matters from the criminal court, went on to state that when any child was found to be dependent or neglected, the court may order the commitment of such a child to an institution or foster home. Thus dependent and neglected children were to be dealt with in like manner.

Such approaches to dependency and neglect in the late nineteenth century were the vestiges of longstanding theoretical beliefs about poverty, according to which the causes of poverty were seen as residing within the poor themselves. It is but a short step from this view to the notion that poor people are not "fit" to raise children, that their pauper characteristics are synonymous with neglect

where children are involved, and that children should be rescued from their pauper influence. Theoretically, there may never have been much opposition to the idea that poverty alone should not be grounds for breaking up families, or to the premise that parents of "worthy character" who are "efficient and deserving" should keep their children. It was just that poverty was thought to coincide with faulty parenthood and unworthiness of character.

There were some departures from this stance. As early as 1887, the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children stated in its Seventh Annual Report that "we never take neglected children by law from their parents, where the neglect arises from honest poverty alone" (in Bremner, 1971, p. 208). Leaving aside the issue of whether a child is removed "by law" or through other means, the questions raised are how much and whose poverty has been seen as "honest" and "alone," how much and whose behavior has been judged neglectful, and whether changing views of poverty and neglect and their relationship to each other have affected the issue of separation.

There can be no doubt that, in modern times, the verbal banner under which the organized forces of child welfare ride is "protect the child and preserve the family," "prevention" of child neglect and abuse as well as foster care placement itself, the foster care only as a "last resort." The byword is prevention. The mere thought, moreover, of placing children for reasons of poverty would seem outrageous to many.

The New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services (1984), for example, proclaims its mission to be to "protect vulnerable children . . . support family preservation . . . prevent family violence and disruption." The federal Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-272) provides that "reasonable efforts will be made . . . to prevent or eliminate the need for removal of the child from his home, and . . . to make it possible for the child to return to his home . . ." Although this Act has been hailed as a reform, the modern rhetoric of prevention goes back at least as far as 1951, when the American Humane Association's

standards for child protective work proclaimed that "protective service . . . is directed not so much at rescuing the child from the home, as preserving, where possible, the home for the child" (in Bremner, 1974, p. 853).

If there has been any change at all in stated policies toward the separation of dependent and neglected children from their parents, from the 1909 White House Conference to the present, it is this: There has been an increasingly greater emphasis on prevention of child neglect and abuse and, beyond not wishing to separate children for reasons of poverty, on keeping families together even in which child maltreatment has occurred, by rehabilitating the parents. The undeniable policy thrust, however, over the course of three quarters of a century, has been to keep families together. This stated policy has, if anything, grown stronger and more unequivocal in its expressed intent of doing whatever may be necessary to prevent the separation of children from their parents.

In fact, however, from long before the turn of the century until present times, there has always been a considerable number of children in the United States living in foster care, who had been put there—in foster family homes, institutions, group homes, or other living arrangements with non-related individuals—through no fault or handicap of their own, by child welfare agencies. While the rationales and motives for separating children from parents have changed over time, a predominant characteristic of displaced children in this country has not changed: by and large they have continued to be poor children from impoverished families.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to examine trends in the national foster care population through the twentieth century, to explore the possible causes of these trends, and to compare policy to reality.

#### THE RATE OF CHILD PLACEMENT, 1910–1983

Estimates of the nation's foster care population at various points in time between 1910 and 1983 are presented in

Table 1 and plotted in Figure 1. They all refer to one-day counts.

The figures for 1910, 1923, and 1933 are based on U.S. Census statistics.<sup>2</sup> The estimates presented for 1961, 1963, and 1965 are derived from a new state reporting system instituted by the U.S. Children's Bureau in 1960.<sup>3</sup> It is known that the foster care population declined after the mid-1930s, and it is believed that the foster care population did not reach its 1933 numerical level again until 1961-1962 (Low, 1966; Boehm, 1970, p. 255). However, the turning point is in doubt, and the upward trend might have begun as early as 1957, and even as early as the late 1940s (as depicted hypothetically by the dashed curve in Figure 1).<sup>4</sup> The estimates for 1975, 1977, 1979, and 1980, and the first estimate listed for 1982 are based on studies, employing varying methodologies, by the Children's Defense Fund, Westat, Inc., the U.S. Office of Civil Rights, the Child Welfare League of America, and Maximus, Inc., respectively. Finally, the 1981 estimate, the second and third estimates listed for 1982, and the 1983 estimate are derived from surveys by the American Public Welfare Association.<sup>5</sup>

It would be an understatement to say that the various estimates presented here are not strictly comparable. Not only are they derived from several different methodologies, but definitional differences (concerning the types of placement arrangements to be included) plague most comparisons.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, certain implausible fluctuations, such as an apparent decline by 200,000 children in two years (from 1977 to 1979), further diminish our confidence in the precision and consistency of these figures.<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless, if we were to suspend belief in the various estimates as precise point figures and regard each estimate as merely representing a *range* and having a margin of error of thousands or even tens of thousands, we have reason to have confidence in the *trends* that emerge. Thus, for example, we have reason to believe that the high point of the foster care population in this century occurred during 1975-77, based as it is on two independent estimates, although we



have little confidence in precisely what the population size was at that time. Indeed, in Figure 1, we observe that a small number of clear trends do emerge, and that at least from 1961 on, the beginning and end of each trend is backed up by estimates at no less than two points in time.

The trends we see are these: the foster care population increased from 1910 until 1933, declined until sometime before 1961, increased until its high point during 1975-77, and declined until 1982. There are indications, based on three estimates derived from consistent studies using the same methodology and procedures (the American Public Welfare Association surveys), that by 1983 the foster care population was on the rise again.<sup>8</sup>

Since the child population of the United States did not remain static over the course of this century, it is necessary to adjust our figures by calculating child placement rates. The U.S. Census statistics for the population of individuals under eighteen years of age are presented in Table 1 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1975, p. 10, Series A29-42; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1984, p. 29, No. 31). The child placement rates, also presented in Table 1, and plotted in Figure 2, indicate the number of children in foster care per every 1,000 children living in the United States at the time. We see that these estimated child placement rates indicate the same trends as do the absolute foster care population estimates.

#### INTERPRETING THE TRENDS: FACTORS RELATED TO CHANGES IN THE RATE OF CHILD PLACEMENT

The 1909 White House Conference, through its stand against breaking up families for reasons of poverty alone, and despite its leaders' distaste for public as opposed to private charity, paved the way, together with the emerging recognition in the early 1900s of the social origins of poverty, for mother's pension legislation (Lubove, 1968, pp. 98-99). The first statewide mother's pension law was enacted in Illinois in 1911, and within the next decade 40 states passed similar legislation (Axinn and Levin, 1982, p. 149).

The express intent of the mother's pension movement was to avert the break-up of families for reasons of poverty

Table 1. Child population in the United States, child population below the poverty level, foster care population, orphan population, child poverty rate, child placement rate, and poverty placement rate during the twentieth century.

Year	U.S. Population under Age 18	Population of related Children under Age 18 below Poverty Level	Foster Care Population**	Orphan Population	Poverty Rate for Related Children under Age 18 (per 100)	Placement Rate (per 1,000)	Poverty Placement Rate (per 100)
1910	35,061,000		151,441			4.3	
1920				750,000			
1923	41,486,000		218,523			5.3	
1930				450,000			
1933	42,186,000		242,929			5.8	
1954				60,000			
1960		17,288,000			26.5		
1961	65,791,000	16,708,000*	244,500			3.7	1.5
1963	68,420,000	15,548,000*	259,600			3.8	1.7
1965	69,731,000	14,388,000	283,300		20.7	4.1	2.0
1970		10,235,000			14.9		
1975	67,165,000	10,882,000	500,000		16.8	7.4	4.6
1977	65,772,000*	10,028,000	503,000		16.0	7.6	5.0
1979	64,379,000*	9,993,000	302,000		16.0	4.7	3.0
1980	63,682,000	11,114,000	274,000		17.9	4.3	2.5
1981	63,208,000	12,068,000	273,000		19.5	4.3	2.3
1982	62,811,000	13,139,000	243,000		21.3	3.9	1.8
—			262,000			4.2	2.0
—			263,000			4.2	
1983	62,374,000		269,000			4.3	

\*Interpolated

\*\*The reader is cautioned that methodological and definitional differences in the derivation of these estimates hinder precise comparison, and that the estimates are presented here (and utilized in Figures 1 and 2) to indicate general trends only.  
(See text and Reference Notes 2-7.)

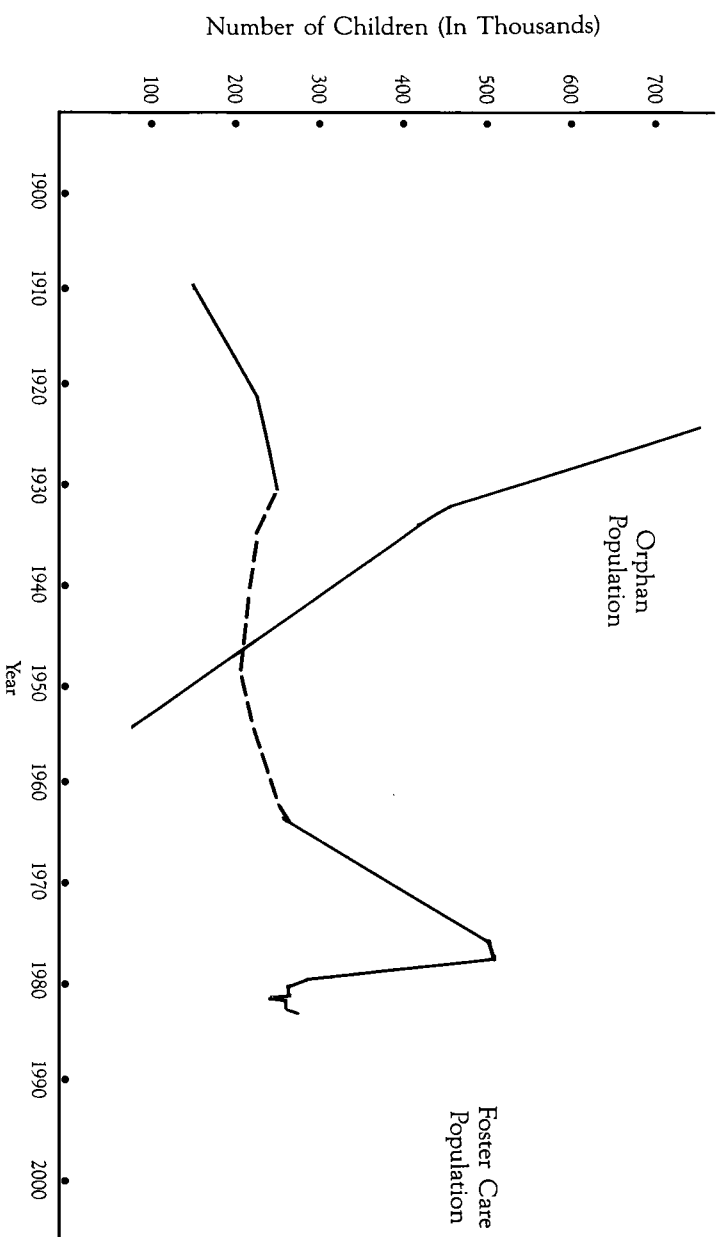


Figure 1. Foster care population and orphan population during the twentieth century.

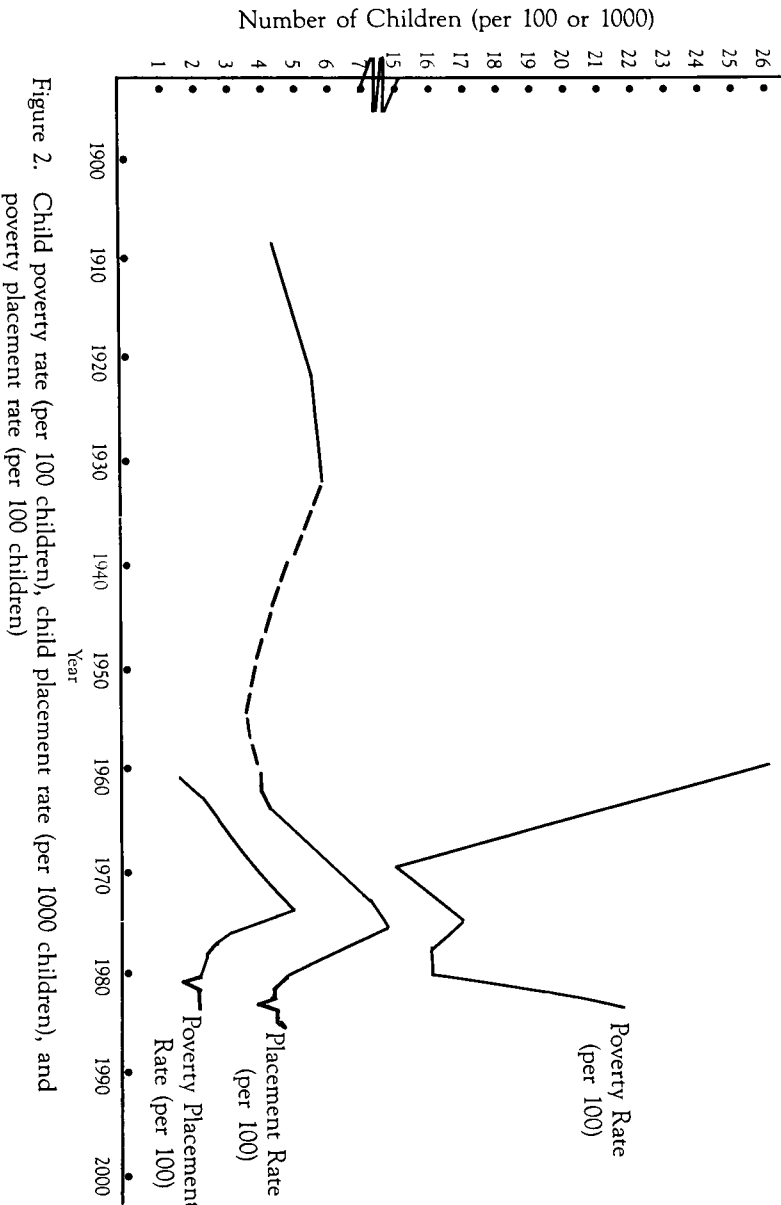


Figure 2. Child poverty rate (per 100 children), child placement rate (per 1000 children), and poverty placement rate (per 100 children)

alone, by giving financial aid, to "deserving" mothers at least, so as to allow them to keep their children (Thompson, 1919, p. 11). Juvenile court judges had been distressed over what they had been forced to do. Reflecting the new understanding of the social origins of poverty, Kansas City juvenile court judge E.E. Porterfield, in arguing for a mother's pension act before the Missouri state legislature, proclaimed: "If the poverty of the mother forces her to neglect her child the poverty should be removed and not the child" (Lubove, 1968, p. 100).

However, competing undercurrents and reservations undermined this intent. The misgivings that private charities had about public pensions, the enduring individualistic view that character deficiencies caused poverty and, beyond that, the fear that aid would promote a "spirit of dependency" and thereby undercut initiative and striving toward economic independence on the part of the mothers, no doubt contributed to the fact that the funds allocated for mothers' pensions were extremely meager and that the individual benefits failed to address the concrete needs created by poverty (Leiby, 1978, p. 151; Lubove, 1968, pp. 101-110; Thompson, 1919, p. 19).

Yet the inadequacy of funding under the mother's pension laws cannot explain, by itself at least, why the child placement rate actually *increased* between 1910 and 1933. This increase is made more remarkable by the fact that the orphan population in our country, once quite large, declined enormously during that time (see Table 1 and Figure 1) (Shudde and Epstein, 1955). It would be difficult to imagine that such "full" orphans, when they existed in large numbers, did not contribute substantially to the foster care population.<sup>9</sup>

The mother's pension laws provided for field investigators to judge which mothers were "inefficient" or "immoral," and which were deserving of aid (Lubove, 1968, p. 109; Thompson, 1919). As Lubove (1968, p. 108) states: "An uneasy balance of economic and vague moral criteria complicated the administration of this legislation." Moreover, relief was combined with "social treatment." Again as Lubove

(1968, p. 110) states: "Application for a pension was presumptive evidence of an inadequacy which differentiated the family from the community mainstream and justified intervention in the client's personal life."

It is possible that, in the absence of appreciable material assistance, increasing numbers of dependent children were redefined as neglected children, and that the mother's pension laws aided this development by sending out investigators to detect, according to their own lights, deficiencies in the conditions of the home and in the mother's moral character.

In 1910, Roswell McCrea wrote: "It is a practical experience . . . that the line between destitute and neglected children is a very shadowy one" (in Bremner, 1917, p. 214). This line would remain hazy so long as adequate financial aid would not be given to destitute families. The distinction between poverty and neglect would become even more difficult by the 1920s when, due to the strong influence of psychoanalytic theory on social work practice, casework came to be based upon a psychodynamic model, and the casework focus shifted further than in its recent past from the environment to the individual (Woodroffe, 1968, pp. 118-147; Lubove, 1965, pp. 80-117). Children would no longer be removed for reasons of poverty, thus in keeping with the 1909 White House Conference doctrine, but rather for psychological defects of the parents presumably resulting in neglect, and the child placement rate continued to increase.

The subsequent decline in the child placement rate, from the mid-1930s, has been attributed by child welfare experts to the Social Security Act of 1935, with its provision of federal funding for Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), and it would be difficult to deny such a causal link (Low, 1966; Boehm, 1970, pp. 224-225). While the financial benefits under this program were still inadequate, they were much better than before.

During the coming decades, many mothers would be denied financial assistance on the grounds of failing to meet

locally established "suitable home" criteria (Bell, 1965, pp. 93-110). But since, as previously noted, we cannot pinpoint how long the decline in the child placement rate lasted, it is difficult to determine whether the decline continued despite this phenomenon, or whether this phenomenon contributed to the subsequent upturn.

In any event, it appears that some semblance of material provision, however still inadequate, to address the concrete needs of poverty, had an impact on the rate of child placement by preventing the need of separating children from their parents in many instances. However, the steep decline of the orphan population during that time raises an unresolved question of just what proportion of the decrease in the child placement rate may be attributable to the financial aid itself under the Social Security Act.

We next face the question of why the child placement rate might have risen during the 1950s, and why it soared beginning with the early 1960s. During the 1950s and early 1960s, public spending for child welfare services in this country had increased to substantial levels. Such expenditures doubled from \$104.9 million in 1950 to \$211.5 million in 1960, and the federal share of these expenditures had grown from 4.0% to 6.3% (Bixby, 1981). Concurrently, the number of employees in public child welfare programs rose considerably (U.S. Children's Bureau, 1953; 1963, Table 21; 1964, Table 21; Low, 1957, Table A).

The major service of child welfare agencies traditionally has been foster care placement. In 1956, for example, 72 percent of total expenditures for child welfare services by state and local agencies went for foster care payments (Low, 1958, Table 1). Thus increased money available to hire more employees simply meant that more placements *could* be made.

Several important occurrences may account for the explosion in the child placement rate from the early 1960s until the 1975-77 period. In the early 1960s, C. Henry Kempe and his colleagues "discovered" child abuse. Focusing on extremely brutalized young children and infants, this team dramatically called attention to what it labeled the "Battered

Child Syndrome," and alluded to psychodynamic causes and "defect in character structure" as underlying this "syndrome" (Kempe, et al., 1962). This "discovery" drew an enormous amount of professional and media interest, and child abuse became a national issue (Pfohl, 1977; Antler, 1981; Nelson, 1984). The passage of reporting laws, requiring physicians, social workers, other professionals, and even all citizens, to report cases of suspected child abuse as well as neglect, developed as a major strategy in dealing with child abuse and neglect. By the end of 1963, thirteen states had already enacted such laws, and by 1973, every state had passed a mandatory reporting law (Antler, 1981). In 1973, the passage of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act established a National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect within the Children's Bureau, and served to draw further attention to the issue of child abuse.

This child abuse movement further encouraged intervention into the lives of families, based on psychodynamic conceptions of the faults of the parents. But this movement, which we will argue here was the driving force behind the increase in the child placement rate, would not have eventuated in this result if new resources had not become available.

As it happened, Title IV of the Social Security Act was amended in 1961 to make federal monies available to states for court-ordered placement of children from families receiving ADC (later AFDC) (Rosenthal and Louis, 1981). However, state child welfare agencies continued to circumvent the courts in the large majority of their placements (Mnookin, 1973; Gershenson, 1984). Thus if this AFDC-FC program functioned as an incentive to increased placement, it did so to a limited extent.

More importantly, the Public Welfare Amendments (to the Social Security Act) of 1962 provided grants-in-aid to the states for social services. These amendments compelled the federal government to match, by 75%, whatever state governments spent on "social services," a term that was left ill-defined, with no ceiling placed on the amount that could be



spent (Derthick, 1975, pp. 1-14). The amendments of 1967 further expanded the scope of spending. Under these amendments, federal spending for social services rose from \$194 million in 1963 to \$354 million in 1969, and then soared to \$1.7 billion by 1972, after which Congress enacted a \$2.5 billion ceiling (Derthick, 1975, pp. 1-14). Federal spending did reach \$2.5 billion by 1977 (Bixby, 1981). It is not known exactly how all of this money was spent, but there are indications that a large proportion did go for foster care (Derthick, 1975, p. 2; Mott, 1976, p. 25). Total expenditures (including federal, state, and local) for social services increased from \$712.6 million in 1970 to \$3.2 billion by 1977 (Bixby, 1981).

In addition, under these same amendments, fixed federal grants to states specifically earmarked for child welfare services rose from \$13.4 million in 1960 to \$56.5 million by 1977 (Bixby, 1981). These expenditures, however, continued to constitute only a small portion of total expenditures specifically designated as child welfare spending, which rose from \$211.5 million in 1960 to \$810 million by 1977, indicating that the states themselves contributed heavily to increased child welfare spending (Bixby, 1981).

Public child welfare agencies expanded enormously during this period, allowing these agencies to investigate more and more cases. In New Jersey, for example, the number of employees of the state child welfare agency rose from under 500 in 1965 (when it was the Bureau of Children's Services) to over 2,000 in 1975 (as the Division of Youth and Family Services) (*Governor's Budget Message*, 1966, 1977). The caseload more than doubled from 19,249 children in 1968 to 44,688 children in 1974 (New Jersey Bureau of Children's Services, 1968; New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services, 1974).

Ironically, although the intent of the amendments was to "strengthen family life," they served to provide the resources for a child abuse crusade whose thrust was to detect psychological defects in impoverished parents rather than to provide concrete services in the home. The crusade provided

the reports to be investigated and the rationale for child removal; the amendments provided the resources for more caseworkers to be hired who could investigate more reports and remove more children.

An increase in the number of caseworkers would not necessarily have led to more removals were it not for the fact that foster care was the primary resource that child welfare agencies possessed. If these agencies had used the social services monies to develop concrete supportive services for the home, then the increased number of workers could have provided more of these, rather than more foster care.

But of great significance was the fact that child neglect had been redefined, in a sense, as child abuse (Wolock and Horowitz, 1984). The image created in the public's mind through the media, often through vivid photographs, was of brutally battered children of the type that Kempe had seen in his Denver hospital. The large, often exaggerated numbers, however, cited by proponents of the movement in order to claim that child abuse had reached "epidemic proportions," referred mainly to cases of far milder abuse, and to the many more cases of marginal neglect seen by public agencies (Pelton, 1978). Aiding this conception of an epidemic was the psychodynamic medical model of child abuse introduced by Kempe and his associates which the social work profession, long enamored of psychodynamic explanations of behavior, embraced wholeheartedly, and the contention that child abuse and neglect "afflicted" families without regard to socioeconomic standing (Pelton, 1978).

Hence child neglect, together with abuse, was seen no longer as an aspect or result of poverty, but as a psychological problem, calling for psychological treatment. When the suspect parents did not respond to "treatment," the children were more likely to be shipped off to foster care, this removal aided by the new and more severe image of what neglect entailed. The fact that the children removed were, as such children have always been, among the poorest children in our society, did not disturb the removers, who held, and continue to hold, to a belief in the myth of classlessness (Pelton, 1978). Under the influence of the new model, even if

more money had been wrested from foster care, it more likely would have gone for more counseling and therapy than for concrete services. In any event, the psychodynamic medical model and the myth of classlessness have facilitated child removal by encouraging the already present inclinations to look for personal deficits in poor people and to overlook the socioeconomic factors involved.

So powerful was the combination of forces described above that it led to the increase in the child placement rate despite the fact that, at least from the late 1950s on, many studies and reports began to indicate to child welfare professionals that separation and the foster care system were doing considerable harm to children (e.g. Maas and Engler, 1959; Wald, 1976). However, due to eventual alarm over the large number of children in foster care and the fact that many children were remaining in foster care for very long periods of time, "permanency planning" became a broad and popular movement within the child welfare field during the late 1970s, and later became a major aspect of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980. The main thrust of this movement has been aimed at children already in foster care: to either get them returned home or freed for adoption. The decline in the child placement rate between 1977 and 1982 is attributable to conscious efforts on the part of public child welfare agencies to decrease the size of the foster care population.

As we have noted, there are indications that the child placement rate was on the rise again by 1983. Indeed, more children *entered* foster care in FY 1983 than in FY 1982 (Tatara and Pettiford, 1985, pp. 33-34). It is possible, then, that the rise is due to a continuing failure to deal with the "front end" of the foster care system, i.e., prevention of foster care placement in the first instance. The permanency planning philosophy, because it is largely directed at children already in foster care, and because it has spurred a push toward adoptions as well as toward returning children home, may lead to increasing numbers of displaced children remaining where they are, but now with adoption papers in hand and parental rights terminated. The child placement rate is on

the rise again despite this push toward adoption. It is as though the child welfare establishment wants to have it both ways: the child abuse crusade continues unabated so that children are placed in foster care almost as readily as before, and attempts are made to keep the foster care population down by getting children out of foster care more quickly. Prevention continues to take a back seat.

## CONCLUSIONS

As stated before, it is largely poor children who populate the foster care system. In her 1967 paper on foster care, after reviewing some of the evidence on the high incidence of poverty among families whose children are placed in foster care, Bernice Boehm (1970, p. 222) wrote:

"It is more than half a century since the tenet was first enunciated that 'no child should be separated from his family for reasons of poverty alone.' It is unforgivable that in more than half a century this basic principle, to which there is such strong commitment, has not been implemented. It may be true that in many instances we do not place for poverty alone, because poverty seldom comes 'alone.' "

Now, three quarters of a century have elapsed, and Boehm's statement still holds true. It is as though some minimal quota of children from poor families is still being sent into foster care, but for different stated reasons. Before the turn of the century, poverty itself would suffice as the reason, although there was the implicit assumption that poverty itself was an indication of the unfitness and immorality of the parents. Later, when poverty was identified as a force outside of parents, and it was held that children should not be removed for reasons of "poverty alone," it was incumbent upon the child removers to make separate "findings" of the unfitness and immorality of impoverished parents. And in more recent times, the parents are not perceived as immoral, but as psychologically defective in some way. If poverty can no longer be located in the parents, then at least the effects of poverty on parents and children can be located there, and children would not be removed for "poverty

alone." The behavioral effects of poverty would now call forth the attribution of motives and personality characteristics indicative of psychological deficiencies. Thus the reasons would be couched in the modern benevolent language of psychology, but the results would be the same: the victims of poverty would be blamed, and the children would be removed.

The number of related children under age eighteen living in families below the poverty level, as well as the poverty rate for such children, for selected years from 1960 to 1982, are shown in Table 1 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1983, p. 21). The poverty rates for children are also plotted in Figure 2. It can be seen that the child placement rates bears no apparent relationship to the poverty rate. For example, during the period 1960-75, the poverty rate declined and then rose, but the child placement rate rose throughout.

On the other hand, we must keep in mind that the children *in* foster care, by and large, come from families living in poverty. Indeed, it is somewhat misleading to calculate placement rates based on the total child population of the nation, since the "pool" from which foster children are drawn more closely corresponds to the smaller "pool" of children who live below the poverty level. Poverty placement rates (i.e., the number of children in foster care per every 100 children living with their own families below the poverty level) for selected years from 1961 to 1983 are presented in Table 1 and plotted in Figure 2. We see that trends in the poverty placement rate parallel those in the original placement rate, although at far higher levels. If foster care population estimates could be taken at face value, we would be able to say that in the 1980s, about two children reside in foster care for every 100 children residing with their own families below the poverty level.

When AFDC recipient families on the caseload of New Jersey's state child welfare agency for alleged abuse and neglect were compared with AFDC families not known to that agency, the former were found to be the poorest of the poor (Wolock and Horowitz, 1979). It is possible that the "pool" from which foster care children are drawn is even smaller

than the one we have just indicated: they may be drawn from an underclass of families most deeply submerged below the poverty level. This might explain why the fivefold increase in the number of children covered by AFDC benefits between 1955 and 1975 did not serve to stem the rise in the placement rate ("Current Operating Statistics," 1985, p. 74). That is, foster children might largely come from a harder-core subset of impoverished families who have always availed themselves of AFDC support.

We may conclude that the child placement rate is not related to the poverty rate, but rather to how our society has treated or dealt with the children of families living in poverty, and especially of those most deeply submerged in poverty. There has always been a sufficient "pool" of impoverished families available to supply large numbers of children to the foster care system. The crucial variable affecting child placement rates has been the nature of the social interventions engaged in by society, not the fluctuating size of the poverty population. One hesitates to say that the crucial factor has been "social policy" in regard to child welfare, for the stated policy through much of this century has been to strengthen and preserve families. Rather, we must look to the social programs implemented, sometimes in the name of that policy, and often misguidedly, that have reflected deep-rooted attitudes toward poor people, and toward approaches needed for the protection of children.

In recent years, perhaps a cyclical pattern has been set in motion in which periodic concerns over child abuse prevention will push up the foster care placement rate, until alarm is again expressed over the rising foster care population. The perception of the value of child abuse prevention as seemingly in conflict with the value of separating as few children as possible is, however, only a product of particular conceptions of child abuse, based on the psychodynamic medical model of child abuse originated by C. Henry Kempe and his colleagues back in the early 1960s. The abiding and prevalent inclination in our society to seek the causes of harm to poor children in the supposed personality deficits of their

parents, whether couched in terms of moralistic or psychological shortcomings, rather than in socioeconomic conditions and forces, will continue to create imagined conflicts between prevention and family preservation.

Under these dynamics, we may expect no sustained reduction in the child placement rate below recent levels. Child welfare officials will continue to respond merely to the immediacy of events, such as a rise in the foster care population, without any significant reform occurring. This pessimistic conclusion is premised on the belief that the social awareness of our society that does indeed find expression in many of its social policies is nonetheless underlain by a deep-seated suspicion of the poor, and that this suspicion will continue to guide the manner in which our programs are carried out and, in effect, the way we deal with the poor.

#### REFERENCE NOTES

1. See, for example, Jenkins and Norman (1972), Claburn and Magura (1977), Gruber (1978), and Levit (1979). Jenkins and Norman, in their study of foster children in New York City, found that just prior to placement, "most of the children in the study lived in impoverished households located in the poorest neighborhoods" of that city (p. 19). It is an interesting fact in itself that there have been no efforts to gather national statistics on the economic status of families from whence foster children come. However, many state and local research studies, such as Gruber's on foster children in Massachusetts, leave no doubt that most such children come from impoverished families.
2. Of the total of 151,441 children in foster care in 1910, 39,927 were outside of institutions (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1913, p. 28, Table 19). On February 1, 1923, there were 218,523 children in the care of institutions and child-placing societies primarily for the care of dependents (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1927, p. 18, Table 2). The figure for 1933 indicates the number of children in agencies' institutions and foster homes, representing institutions and agencies caring for dependent and neglected children (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1935, p. 8, Table 4; p. 1).
3. The figure for 1961 represents children in institutions for the dependent and neglected, in foster family homes, and in group homes (U.S. Children's Bureau, 1962, p. 30, Table 25). The figures for 1963 and 1965 represent the same categories (U. S. Children's Bureau,

1964, p. 9, Table 6; 1966, p. 15, Table 2). We do not present the 1960 statistics here because of an apparent incomplete implementation of the system during its first year of operation (see Jeter, 1962; U. S. Children's Bureau, 1961).

4. See, for example, Jeter and Lajewski (1958). Before 1961, the estimates reported in the Children's Bureau Statistical Series did not include children served only by voluntary child welfare programs. This led to considerable undercounts of children in institutions. Considering all available information, our best guess is that it is not likely that the foster care population, after 1933, ever dipped below 200,000, nor the child placement rate (see text) below 3.5.
5. The estimate for 1975 is from a Children's Defense Fund study, based on a variety of statistical data (Knitzer, Allen, and McGowan, 1978). The 1977 estimate, from a Ewstat study, is based on a sample of almost 10,000 case records from a sample of 315 local public child welfare agencies (Shyne and Shroeder, 1978). The 1979 estimate is based on a survey by the U.S. Office of Civil Rights requesting all of the more than 2,400 public child welfare agencies in the country to provide statistical information (U.S. Office of Civil Rights, 1980). The 1980 estimate was derived from state statistical reports by the Child Welfare League of America (1983). The 243,000 figure for 1982 was due to a study by Maximus, Inc., based on a sampling of case records from a national sample of 167 local public child welfare agencies (Maximus, Inc., 1983). Finally, the American Public Welfare Association estimates for 1981, 1982, and 1983 were derived from state statistical reports (see Tatara and Pettiford, 1985, p. 32, Table III). The 1982 262,000 figure refers to the last day of FY 1982, the 263,000 figure to the first day of FY 1983, and the 269,000 figure to the last day of FY 1983.
6. For example, there has been variation in regard to the inclusion of children in pre-adoptive homes, emergency care, detention centers, runaway shelters, independent living arrangements, and those living with relatives and whose placements were arranged and/or paid for by public child welfare agencies. According to Dr. Charles Gershenson of the Children's Bureau, 10 different state definitions of foster care are currently in use (Gershenson, 1985). According to Dr. Toshio Tatara, who directs the American Public Welfare Association data collection effort, 34 states define children in pre-adoptive homes as part of the foster care population, while the remaining states consider such children to have left foster care (Tatara, 1985).
7. According to Dr. Charles Gershenson, it has been determined by Westat and the Children's Bureau that of the apparent decline of 200,000 children from the 1977 Westat estimate to the Office of Civil



Rights figure for 1979, 110,000 was due to definitional differences and therefore was not real.

8. At the time that this article went to press, the latest as yet unpublished statistics available from the American Public Welfare Association surveys indicated a continued rise in the foster care population to 276,000 at the end of FY 1984.
9. For example, according to a report by the State of New Jersey Pension Survey Commission (1932), there were 3,685 children under state supervision in foster homes and institutions in October 1931. Of these plus another 894 children placed with relatives, 557 were orphans.

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THE FAILURE OF THE  
DESTITUTE MOTHER'S BILL:  
THE USE OF POLITICAL POWER  
IN SOCIAL WELFARE

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*Although social and economic conditions and prevailing popular philosophies may affect the success or failure of an attempt at change in social welfare policy and practice, the relative strengths and weaknesses of the political forces for and against the change may be more important. In 1897, fourteen years before the passage of the first U.S. Mothers' Pension law in Illinois, New York State Senator John Ahearn attempted such a law in New York. Although the bill was passed unanimously by both houses of the State Legislature, it was never signed into law. The reason was that the children's institutions and other philanthropic organizations formed a coalition and effectively organized against the proposed bill, while supporters of the bill were not organized. Although it failed, this attempt contributed to the future passage of Mothers' Pensions law by helping to bring the issue to public attention, and stimulating the creation of other programs that would address the problem.*

At approximately thirty year intervals, attempts are made to significantly change the policies and practices of the social welfare institutions in the United States. In 1935, for example, the Social Security Act became federal law. In the 1960's, attempts were made, at various levels of government,

to liberalize the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. Currently, major changes, such as the addition of work requirements for mothers of young children, are also being considered. While reforms of the 1960's were often met with strenuous resistance, current proposals appear to be gathering general support.

Why are some proposed changes implemented, while others are not? The answer lies, in part, in social and economic conditions, and prevailing philosophies of the times. Still more influential, however, may be the relative strengths and weaknesses of the political forces for and against the changes, with whom those forces are allied, and how well they are organized.

Such failures to initiate reforms, however, may also be precursors of successful attempts. Outcomes may be (1) that the issues are brought to public attention for later action; (2) that more effective efforts may then be organized; and (3) that alternate programs addressing the problems may be developed.

This paper examines one historical instance of successful resistance to reform; the failure of an attempt to change public policy regarding dependent children and their families in New York City at the turn of the century. It also examines the contribution of that effort to eventual success.

## THE STORY OF THE DESTITUTE MOTHERS' BILL

On March 30, 1897,<sup>1</sup> State Senator John Francis Ahearn of New York City introduced a reform bill in the New York State Legislature. His bill would have provided funds for some destitute New York City parents and would have enabled them to care for their own children instead of being forced to place them in institutions. The act, which was called the "Destitute Mothers' Bill", read as follows:

"When any child shall hereafter be committed to the care of any institution in the city of New York, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in said city, shall, upon the

application of the parent or guardian of such child, in a proper case, after a careful and thorough inquiry, direct that the custody of such child be given to its parent or guardian, and in such event the comptroller of said city of New York is authorized to pay said society, for transmission by it to such a parent or guardian, the money allowed by law for the maintenance, care and welfare of such child and paid by said city to the institution to which it may have been committed.

"The said society may revoke any such change of custody and return such child to the institution to which it was originally committed, whenever in its judgment the interests of said child will be benefited thereby . . ."

The New York City charitable organizations were in complete and unanimous disagreement with this reform proposal. But initially, they took no action, since they had been assured that the bill would be killed. Nine days after it was introduced, however, the "Destitute Mothers' Bill" unanimously passed the Senate, and the day after, the Assembly. Neither body had held hearings. Since this proposed law would apply exclusively to New York City,<sup>2</sup> however, the Mayor was required to hold a public hearing. This was scheduled for April 21st. In preparation, the State Charities Aid Association circulated an alert to all New York City Charitable organizations. The alert was successful. At the hearing, which lasted less than one hour, there were only two speakers for the bill, and more than twelve against. Among the twelve against were representatives of both private and governmental agencies: William R. Stewart, President of the State Board of Charities; John P. Fauvre, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Public Charities; John B. Pine, representative of the State Charities Aid Association; representatives of agencies that maintained children's institutions and agencies that worked with poor families; and Elbridge T. Gerry, President of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the agency that would be charged with dispensing payments and supervising the destitute families should the Ahearn bill become law.



The agencies' arguments attacked all key provisions of the proposed bill. If it were passed, they said, a system of public outdoor relief would be reestablished in the City, and this, they claimed, would "promote pauperism, discourage self-reliance and thrift, and . . . (would be) liable to flagrant abuses" (Twenty-fifth Annual Report . . . , 1897, pp. 81-82). In addition, it was argued that the sum was set without relation to the need of the parties to be aided; administration of the law was to be placed in the hands of a private corporation with no responsibility to the taxpayers; parents receiving two dollars per week per child would not have enough money because they would not be supplemented with additional private funds as were the institutions; and above all, it was objected that the bill would encourage "shiftless fathers" to desert their families since the later could then be supported by public monies. Based on this assumption, it was argued that the number of children to be supported as public charges would grow. The City was then spending almost \$2,000,000 per year for the care of dependent children: if the bill were passed, many additional families would surely apply for public money because they would no longer have to suffer the pain of separation in order to feed their children.

The only speakers in favor of the bill were Bernard Downing, who represented Senator Ahearn, and Mrs. Silas P. Severidge, who said that she devoted a great deal of her time to visiting the poor, but was not connected with any particular organization. Mr. Downing focused his testimony on the harm to children that results from institutionalization. As reported by Homer Folks in the July-August issue of the *Charities Review*, Downing said that he ". . . wished that a Dickens might be present to portray these benevolent managers, who insisted that the only proper way to assist a poor mother was to take her children away from her and support them in their institutions" (Folks 1897, p. 497). Folks reported that Mrs. Severidge "assured the Mayor that, if he could appreciate the distress and suffering of parents who had been compelled to give up their children, he would not

withhold his signature from the bill''<sup>3</sup> (Folks, 1897, p. 497).

The Mayor had fifteen days from the time he received the bill to return it to the Legislature with his comments. His disapproval reached them on the last possible day. Unfortunately for the proponents of the bill, this was the last day of the legislative session, and it was too late for the legislature to re-vote it over the Mayor's disapproval. It was never signed by the Governor.

In 1898, on the first day of the next legislative session, the Destitute Mothers' Bill was again introduced by Senator Ahearn. This time the charity organizations were ready: they called for and got hearings before the Senate Committee on the Affairs of Cities.<sup>4</sup> The bill was bottled up in this committee and never reached the floor for a vote, nor did it the following year, even when it was introduced in modified form to meet the objections of the charity organizations.

The Sixteenth Annual Report of the Charity Organization Society of New York describes that hearing.<sup>5</sup> It was argued that:

"... this plan is a scarcely disguised form of outdoor relief, that there are serious objections to any plan by which the State undertakes to pay parents for the care of their own children, and that 'shiftless fathers' would be quite as apt as 'destitute mothers' to claim the indulgence of the Society and the public. All these and other weighty, if less obvious arguments were urged in a variety of telling addresses before the Senate Committee by a strong representative delegation from the charitable societies and institutions of New York City, and the committee, accepting the views thus presented, allowed the bill to remain unreported (Sixteenth Annual Report . . ., 1898, pp. 10-11).

The bill failed despite the fact that there had begun to be public distrust of children's institutions. Abraham Epstein, describing public opinion in the 1890's observed that there was a

"... realization that huge asylums were bad for children, mothers and society . . . Institutional life dulled and blighted the inmates. Institutional children were frequently slower to

develop, and altogether too many were unable to cope with life outside of the institution. Even a second-rate mother was recognized as better than the very best institution, while a good mother could do for her own children what no other woman or organization could do . . . Some low-grade institutions also showed exceedingly high death rates which shocked the nation" (Epstein, 1933, p. 623).

From 1894 through 1898, the *New York Times* carried numerous stories about institutions' mistreatment and illegal transport of children West, and also related instances in which institutions refused to cooperate with the Commissioner of Accounts when he tried to investigate alleged City overpayments for the care of children who were public charges. On June 5th of 1895, for example, an article appeared under the headline, "Deborah Nursery: Superintendent B. Abrams charged with cruelty"<sup>6</sup> from March, 1894 through October, 1897, nineteen stories appeared about allegations of cruelty and corporal punishment of inmates by the Superintendent of the Westchester Temporary Home for Destitute Children, J.W. Pierce.<sup>7</sup> In June 1897, stories appeared relating that "New York Foundling Asylum Agent R. Curran sells children in Chicago"<sup>8</sup>; on April 1, 1897, there was a report that "John Neese (was) sent West by Gerry Society Without Guardian's Permission"<sup>9</sup>. In November, 1894, a story appeared relating that "Charitable institutions (are) paid for more County Wards than Legal . . ."<sup>10</sup>; in August, 1896, there was a report of investigations by the Commissioner of Accounts over overpayments by the City Controller to the Infant Asylum<sup>11</sup>; and in May, 1898, there were several articles about another investigation by the Commissioner of Accounts: this time, of the Immaculate Virgin Mission on Staten Island<sup>12</sup>

Not only the *New York Times*, but other periodicals published articles opposing the use of institutions for the care of dependent children. An example of such an article appeared in the *North American Review* of April, 1897. It depicted the "evil results of institutional life and training." Its author, Henry Smith Williams, cited the fact that New York City was then caring for 16,000 children in twenty-five institu-

tions, one in thirty-five, at a cost of about four million dollars annually. He believed such care was inappropriate and expensive:

" . . . About 70,000 children in the U.S. are being reared in this abnormal way, and the taxpayers and benevolent individuals are together paying over \$10,000,000 a year . . . How much it cost them later on to complete the task in the police courts, almshouses, work houses and prisons, it would be impossible to correctly estimate" (Williams, 1897, pp. 404-414).

Nor was the press alone. Judges, who in some places had the responsibility for committing children to be cared for at State expense, often became spokesmen against institutional child-rearing. Senator Ahearn, who had spent five years as a clerk of one of the New York City police courts, witnessed countless cases of children removed from their families and sent to institutions solely because their parents were unable to provide for them financially.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE "NEW YORK SYSTEM" FOR THE CARE OF DESTITUTE CHILDREN

To understand why the care of dependent children had become a serious public concern in New York City, it is necessary to consider how children's institutions evolved there.

While social welfare services were developing largely as government-run entities in most parts of the United States, New York City had instead developed a system of publicly funded private agencies, largely controlled by their philanthropic boards.

As early as 1811, the New York State Legislature provided funds for the institutional care of dependent children by private agencies. By the middle of the century, large-scale immigration, uncontrolled industrialization and sharp business swings were responsible for the development of a growing class of urban poor. The number of children whose parents were unable to care for them multiplied. Immigration brought social disorganization: parents who had difficulty coping in a new land with a new language, culture and

societal values had the added difficulty of coping with unemployment, low pay, and the demands of working long hours in order to eat. Some were unable to provide needed food, clothing and shelter. Many were unable to exercise the necessary parental guidance and control that would insure that the children would grow up with the ability to function appropriately. Some children became vagrants.

Brace's solution was the "placing out" of children with families in the country. From 1853 through 1890, the Children's Aid Society moved more than 85,000 children from New York City to farm families in upstate New York, New Jersey, and as far away as Minnesota, Kansas and Texas.<sup>13</sup> Not all of these children were abandoned vagrants or orphans, however. Many were brought to the Society by parents who were too poor to provide food and other necessities. Giving them up was the only way to keep the children alive. He placed children without regard to religion. While many of the new immigrants were Roman Catholics, and later, Jews, most of the farmers who received the children were Protestants.

In reaction, Catholics and Jews created large congregational institutions for the care of their co-religionists' children. However, although these were established under voluntary and sectarian auspices, they were in large part funded by the City and State of New York. The Hebrew Benevolent Society and Orphan Asylum in the City of New York, for example, received a parcel of land on 77th Street and Third Avenue, donated by the City for the purpose of erecting a building to house 200 orphans. The City also contributed \$30,000 toward building costs, and the State Assembly agreed to contribute another \$35,000. The Society had only to raise \$20,000. By 1874, the Society was receiving about 70 percent of its operating budget, or \$23,203.97, from public funds (Bernard, 1973, p. 10 and 14).

The very next year, the legislature adopted an act that would stimulate even greater growth in the use of institutions to house children. The Children's Law of 1875<sup>14</sup> required that children between the ages of three and sixteen

be removed from poorhouses ("unless such child be an unteachable idiot, an epileptic or paralytic, or be defective, diseased or deformed . . .") and were to be placed in a children's institution or home governed by persons of the same religion as their parents (Schneider and Deutch, 1938-1941 p. 63).

The result was a rapid growth in specialized children's institutions. In 1875, the year of enactment, there were only 9,363 institutionalized New York City children who were public charges. By 1888, the number had increased by 68 percent, to 15,697. During this period, the amount of public monies spent for the care of those children rose by 115 percent (N.Y. State Board of Charities, 1980, p. 181). By 1898, the number of children in care away from their families had risen to 18,000. The time that each child remained in care also lengthened during this period. In 1875, only 8 percent of all institutionalized children stayed more than five years: by 1894, 23 percent were long-term residents (Bernard, 1973, p. 34).

Public response to this change led to attempts at systemic change that would limit the number of children in care. The Revised Constitution of 1894 gave more power to the state supervising body, the State Board of Charities. This body then issued tightened eligibility requirements and required public agency approval before children could be placed in private institutions as public charges. The New York City Department of Public Charities employed a staff of examiners to investigate the circumstances of families before the children were placed, and at yearly intervals thereafter.

The new measures were effective as long as they were enforced. While there had been an increase of 15.8 percent in the number of institutionalized children from 1890 to 1894, there was a decrease from 1894 to 1896 of 8.6 percent (State Charities Aid Association of New York, 1898, p. 6). The fact that New York was in the throes of an acute economic depression through 1895 makes this decrease even more significant. The number rose again in 1897, however. The Annual Report of the State Charities Aid Association of

November 1, 1898, stated that "... the New Constitution (was) remarkably successful and effective for about three years, appears to have lost something of its restraining force" (State Charities Aid Association of New York, 1898, p. 10). As the cost to the public again grew, so did public concern.

#### THE OPPOSITION OF THE "PHILANTHROPIC COMMUNITY" TO MOTHERS' PENSIONS

Even though there was a developing consensus against institutions, the defenders of the institutions profited from the fact that, in 1897, social welfare leaders still regarded a destitute mothers' subsidy as an alternative even worse than institutionalization. To them, the primary objection was that Senator Ahearn's proposed reform would route public money to poor parents.

The bill was opposed not only by representatives of childcaring institutions who stood to lose public funding if the law passed: it was also opposed by officials of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and by other social work organizations<sup>15</sup> who, even though they were against institutionalization of children, could not support a reform that would make benefit payments to poor parents.

Notable social workers who spoke out against mothers' pensions were Mary Richmond, Edward T. Devine, and Josephine Lowell, founder of the New York Charity Organization Society and member of the New York State Board of Charities from 1876 to 1889. Lowell was against mothers' pensions even though she believed that institutions were bad for children, and had previously stated that "... it ought to be considered cruel and wicked to take children away from a decent mother just for want of money to support them and friends to look after them. . . ." Her fear of the encouragement of "pauperism", however, appeared to have been stronger than her belief that poor children should not be removed from their mothers.

The agency that took the lead in organizing the opposi-

tion to what some social workers called Ahearn's "Shiftless Fathers' Bill" was the State Charities Aid Association, an organization whose general secretary, Homer Folks, was actually an active proponent of keeping children out of institutions.

Why, then, was there such adamant opposition to subsidizing poor parents so as to prevent institutionalization? According to I.M. Rubinow, who wrote in 1934, one explanation of the resistance of social work to "mothers' pensions" is that it resulted from the identification of social work of the late 19th century with private philanthropy (Rubinow, 1934, p. 487). The Boards of both children's institutions and charity organizations were largely composed of philanthropists who were closely related to the industrial elite.

Most philanthropists were adamantly opposed to any form of outdoor relief. During one forum on mothers' pensions, for example, philanthropist, Otto T. Bannard, argued that "... widows' pensions would eventually lead to such horrors as old-age pensions, free food for the unemployed, will breed candidates for alms, will repress self-help and self-respect, is not American, and is the entering wedge of state socialism (Rubinow, 1934, pp. 487-488).

Statements such as this were not simply a matter of rich versus poor, however. To fully understand why mothers' pensions in general, and Senator Ahearn's proposal in particular were so heartily condemned, it is necessary to understand the role social welfare organizations played in relation to the political and philosophical debates of the era. One must also understand the degree to which local social work was shaped by the corrupt politics of New York City in the late 19th century.

#### THE "ESTABLISHMENT'S" VIEW OF THE POOR

Social workers, philanthropists and New York State officials of the latter half of the Nineteenth Century tended to believe that the poor were responsible for their poverty. According to the New York State Senate's *Report of the Select*



*Committee Appointed to Visit Charitable Institutions Supported by the State* in 1857, “. . . the kind of poverty which ends in a poor house . . . is not unusually the result of such self-indulgence, unthrift, excess, or idleness, as is next of kind to criminality” (New York State Senate, 1857, pp. 9-10).

“Pauperism”, as opposed to poverty, was of particular concern to many nineteenth century Americans: its discussion constituted a major topic of the first meeting of the National Conference of Boards of Public Charities, in May 1874. According to Frank J. Bruno, primary concern was for “the weakness of the victims of destitution . . . for treatment, and even for cure, and not much attention was paid to those situations, external to the dependent, which might throw some light upon the reasons for their dependence” (Bruno, 1957, p. 27).

According to the common wisdom of the rich of the era, the poor, who chose their lot, were unwilling to work hard, preferring a life of vice, ignorance and crime. They had comparatively little self-control: Brace wrote that “. . . the high lessons of duty and consideration for others are seldom stamped on them, and Religion does not much influence their more delicate relations with those associated with them” (Brace, 1872, p. 40). F.A. Walker, in the December 1897 issue of *Century Magazine*, wrote:

“Pauperism is, in truth, largely voluntary to the full degree in which anything can be said to be voluntary in a world of causation, a matter, if not of definite and conscious choice, then of appetites and aptitudes indulged or submitted to from inherent baseness or cowardice or moral weakness. Those who are paupers are so far more from character than from condition. They have the pauper taint; they bear the pauper brand (Walker, 1897, p. 210; Howard, 1897).

Even Amos Warner, a social welfare leader who pioneered in the consideration of social causes of poverty, in his first edition of *American Charities*, published in 1894, “treated poverty no matter what the cause, as synonymous with ‘degeneration’ ” (Bremner, 1956, p. 71).

One prevailing philosophy of the day was “Social Dar-

winism." Darwin's study of evolution was interpreted by Herbert Spencer, an English civil engineer turned sociologist, to mean that those who were unable to maintain themselves in society should not be aided by those more able, but should be allowed to die lest they reproduce more of their own kind and thus weaken society. According to Spencer, "The unfit must be eliminated as nature intended, for the principle of natural selection must not be violated by the artificial preservation of those least able to take care of themselves (Bremner, 1956, p. 71).

The principles of Social Darwinism were not fully accepted in the United States, but were modified by a strong tradition which still saw a value in charitable impulses stimulated by the presence of poor people. According to Tratner, "even Herbert Spencer, when accused of hardness of heart because of his attitude toward the poor . . . retreated to the position that voluntary charity could be tolerated in that it encouraged the development of altruism, a Christian Virtue" (Bremner, 1956, p. 82).

Those who were concerned with the care of dependent children in the United States were often influenced by a Social Darwinist philosophy. They believed, however, that even though poor adults were not redeemable, their children could be taught and would be positively affected by positive environments. Brace believed that since so many of the poor died before adulthood, the survivors might be genetically superior to their parents. He therefore argued that if poor children were removed from the poor environment of their parental homes and placed in positive environments on farms and in country villages, their inherent virtues would triumph and they would become productive and well-behaved citizens (Brace, 1872, pp. 45-46). In accordance with such philosophies, it was considered more appropriate for dependent children of the later half of the nineteenth century to be cared for apart from their poor parents, who therefore, would not need financial support.

The giving of alms or other "outdoor relief" was supposed to have encouraged "pauperism" and economic de-

pendency, "a pernicious social disease." Therefore, the givers of philanthropy in the 1890's "operated on the theory that people ought to be self-supporting and that those who were not must be led or driven into taking care of themselves" (Bremner, 1956, p. 124).

Many believed that the English were correct in their administration of poor relief, where new Poor Law provisions, passed as early as 1834, eliminated outdoor relief, entirely. Mr. Peabody, in his article, "How Should a City Care for its Poor", published in December, 1892, said that, "We, like the English, distrust out-door relief; we apply the "poor-house test". If a person is not willing to go to a city institution, we argue, he is probably not poor enough to need city help . . . we defend the community from the pauper" (Peabody, 1892, pp. 474-491). Only those who were thoroughly investigated by a private agency and were deemed "worthy" should be given limited help; preferably in the form of work.

Although industrial expansion brought growing wealth for the nation, it also brought periodic depressions where countless laborers were thrown out of work. At best, workers had to accept inadequate wages, according to what the market would bear, and poor housing conditions. Until the end of the century, these conditions tended to be largely ignored, however. While poverty was regarded as an indicator of criminality and inferiority, money, and those who acquired it, by whatever means, became the nation's heroes. Those who were unable to maintain themselves were considered genetically and morally unfit (Trattner, 1974, p. 81).

Even as the philanthropists and their social work agency representatives embraced an "anti-poor" philosophy, there are indicators of a more sympathetic public attitude (Gladden, 1892; and Abbott, 1894). The closing of the frontier, and the obvious dearth of jobs during economic depressions made the poor seem less like criminals and more like victims (Bremner, 1956, p. 30). In many areas of the country, especially during and after the Civil War, the practice of providing public outdoor relief to those in need, continued.

In New York and in some other large cities, however,

where there were many more philanthropists and social workers, the tendency was to provide "outdoor relief" through private agencies only, and "indoor" or almshouse relief through government. Not only did this policy follow logically from the ideology of the "establishment", it could also be defended as a way of preventing public graft and bribery.

#### PHILANTHROPISTS' OPPOSITION TO TAMMANY

Corruption in government was rampant in big cities. During the reign of "Boss Tweed" in New York, the public treasury was systematically raided. An investigation of the Department of Public Charities in 1874 showed serious discrepancies, and led to a sharp reduction in the Department's budget (Schneider . . . , p. 35). Social workers and others complained that public relief went to aid not those who were worthy and in need, but was primarily used to buy votes, and to reward the politicians' friends.

In reality, the "Tammany Hall" politicians and their public welfare system were in competition with private relief agencies. Many poor persons found application to private agencies demeaning and embarrassing, and preferred instead to seek financial assistance from politicians who asked in return their votes rather than their self-respect.

The anti-corruption forces, which included the social welfare community and many of their rich and powerful board members, worked to put their own "reform" candidates into office. When these "good government" forces gained power, Tammany's "alternative" welfare system was destroyed with the cessation of public outdoor relief in New York City. In the midst of a prolonged economic depression that lasted from 1873 to 1878, the Board of Estimate voted (during February 1875) to limit public relief to cash grants to the adult blind, and to the distribution of a half-ton of coal each to needy families during the winter. In December 1876, in the midst of the coal distribution, they voted to discontinue all public outdoor relief except to blind persons.

Private charity was supposed to take up the slack. How-

ever, in reality, as the number of unemployed persons increased, that became an impossibility. During the suspension of public relief in the last half of 1874, for example, the caseload of the Association for Improving the Conditions of the Poor increased by 355 percent. In 1873 the organization aided 5,292 persons; in 1874, 24,091. Naturally, each family got less, since the dollars expended less than doubled.

It became evident that private funds were insufficient; public funds were needed. In 1876 and 1877 the Board of Estimate voted money to private agencies for direct aid: on January 20, 1876, the sum of \$35,200 was granted to six private agencies to be expended "during the present winter for food, clothing and shelter for the poor (Schneider, 1938-1941, p. 35). Public money was again being used. This time, however, there was less of it, and control was in the hands of the rich philanthropists and their agents rather than politicians whom they did not control.

By the time of the depression of 1893 to 1895, both city and private organizations had developed work relief programs. While these were inadequate to the number of persons unemployed, they were consistent with the belief that the giving of alms encouraged pauperism. The Twentieth Annual Report of the Charity Organization Society of the City of New York contains a clear statement of that philosophy. It read:

"The ideas upon which organized charity rest are that pauperism—the degrading dependence of one person or family upon others for the necessities of life—should not be encouraged or acquiesced in, but, on the contrary, that it should be energetically and hopefully combated; that the transformation of those who are by nature or by misfortune dependents upon charity into self-supporting and self-respecting members of the community requires patience, skill and devotion; that a judicious combination of volunteer and professional service is most likely to produce the desired result; and that when temporary or even permanent financial assistance is necessary, as it often is, such assistance should not be given mechanically or carelessly—in other words, as alms, or doles—but on full and accurate knowledge, on a definite plan, and with personal interest in the individual who is

helped, as a human being" (The Charity Organization Society of the City of New York, 1902, p. 13).

#### PRIVATE CHARITY'S ALTERNATIVES TO MOTHERS' PENSIONS

Senator Ahearn's attempt was part of a growing dissatisfaction with one way of caring for dependent children, and a move toward another. Although its failure meant that many children who could live with their families would continue to be cared for in institutions for some years, it also stimulated further action and development of alternative programs. The organizations that fought the bill, even though they were against institutionalization of children, were stimulated to look for alternative methods of addressing the problem. In an effort to eliminate the need for mothers' pensions, then, the private charitable organizations developed a number of programs designed to keep children with their families. Day nurseries for the children of working mothers, and programs of private relief were established and grew; job-placing programs were developed. The State Charities' Aid Association was constantly looking for alternatives that would prevent the separation of mothers and their children (Schneider . . . , pp. 181-183). They organized a program to place single mothers in positions in the country where their children would be accepted.

Indeed, as a direct outgrowth of the Ahearn bill, the Charity Organization Society created their "Committee on Dependent Children", which was to examine all applications made by parents for the institutional care of their children, and, as an alternative to placement, to help all "worthy" families remain together. Since all applications for institutionalization were processed through the Department of Public Charities, each day a representative of the Committee went to their offices to examine the records. Home investigations were made of the most likely candidates for their services, and those families deemed "worthy" were aided. In its Seventeenth Annual Report, the Committee proudly stated that no special funding was needed for this program, because the Society "called upon friends, relatives, employers,

neighbors or . . . when necessary, turned to strangers—either individual donors or relief societies” such as the St. Vincent de Paul or the United Hebrew Charities (The Charity Organization Society of New York, 1899, p. 14).

Few families were found worthy, however. During the first year, the Society examined the records of 888 families representing the possible placement of 1,607 children. Their standards must have been exceedingly stringent, however. According to their report, most of the families were not considered worthy of Charity Organization Society assistance: 599 families were rejected, and 1,111 children, or 69% of the total, were institutionalized.

### THE ULTIMATE PASSAGE OF MOTHERS' PENSIONS LAWS

Twelve years after the first introduction of the “Destitute Mothers' Bill”, in 1909, the first White House Conference on Children issued a pronouncement that “Home life is the highest and finest product of civilization . . . children should not be deprived of it except for urgent and compelling reasons . . .”<sup>16</sup> This pronouncement gave voice to what had become, by 1909, a widespread sentiment in favor of legislation to provide “widows' pensions”, or financial assistance for mothers of children whose father were dead or otherwise absent and unable to assume financial responsibility for them. Such legislation was at last initiated in 1911 in Illinois and reached New York in 1915. These laws were the precursors to the federal AFDC provisions of the Social Security Act of 1935.

A number of factors led to the eventual passage of these reforms. According to Schneider, mothers' pensions finally became a reality when social outrage demanded them. During the years from 1895 to 1915, the public's growing interest in child welfare, in conjunction with other reforms of the Progressive Era, led to an extension of responsibility for the welfare of the dependent, delinquent and handicapped children (Schneider . . . , p. 197). In addition, institutionalization was costly. Epstein, who commented in 1933, stated that “. . . public authorities outraged motherhood [not only] by breaking up homes and paying for the support of dependent children in institutions . . . [but also because] the cost in

dollars and cents proved higher than if the mother had been paid for raising her children" (Epstein, 1933, p. 624).

Support for mother's pensions had indeed grown. According to Mark Leff, a number of progressive newspapers and magazines contributed to public demand for change. The *Delineator*, a women's fashion magazine, began an active anti-institution campaign in 1907 which eventually grew into a crusade for mother's pensions. Other newspapers and magazines that contributed editorials and endorsements were the *New York Evening World*, the *Scripps-McRae* and *Hearst* chains, and *Outlook*, *Nation*, and *Public*.

Soon after the establishment of juvenile courts, many judges became aware that mothers' pensions were needed. It became evident from the experience in such courts that (1) many delinquents were the children of mothers who were not around to train, influence and care for their children because they had to work, and (2) that many mothers and children were separated solely because of poverty (Cohen, 1924, pp. 115-116).

By 1909, many advocates believed that children had a right to be brought up in a family. At the White House Conference on Children in 1909, the Honorable Julian Mack, Judge of the Cook County Circuit Court said:

"I cannot understand why poverty alone should give anybody the right to deprive the child of that which it needs most in life—its own parents' love and care and sympathy . . . to deprive the parent of that which he or she needs most in life, the love and support of the child, the reciprocal relations between the parent and the child."<sup>17</sup>

Some (but certainly not all) Charity Organization Society and Children's social workers who had been against mothers' pensions now supported them. What seemed like a daring and unwise idea to the social workers and philanthropists of 1897 became public policy in most states by 1915, federal law by 1935, and has remained in force ever since. Despite the fact that the number and type of mothers covered was always limited, despite intermittent controversy about the effects of public assistance on recipients, and de-



spite recent attempts to restrict that assistance; the complete elimination of the AFDC program has never since been seriously proposed.

## CONCLUSION

It should be noted that there are two principle explanations for the resistance to mothers' pensions. First, the charitable organizations of the 1890's were committed to their social philosophy. They believed they were right about the nature of poverty, and of poor persons. A system of public mothers' pensions would be in direct contradiction to what they believed was just, proper and effective. They therefore acted on their beliefs in an effective, efficient and well-organized way. They acknowledged the problem, and offered what they saw as a solution, condemning Senator Ahearn's solution because (1) they believed it would cause more problems than it would solve, and (2) it would cause them to lose some of their power to exercise control over the behavior of poor persons.

The second explanation has to do with the nature of the organizations involved and of their interests. The nature of a bureaucracy is that it works not only to carry out its societal function, but also to insure its own survival. According to Merton's theory of "vested interests", it is to the advantage of those in power to oppose any change that will "either eliminate or at least make uncertain their differential advantage deriving from current arrangements" (Merton, 1968, p. 253).

It was their vested interests that accounted for the great resistance put forth by the agencies. On the one hand, the children's institutions stood to lose children and therefore a portion of their funding. Earlier action by City and State had already resulted in a reduction in the number of children in care, and such children were needed if the institutions were to survive. The organizations that dispensed private charity, on the other hand, stood to lose their central function in the social welfare field if public outdoor relief became the method for aiding the poor. And, the implementation of a

program so contrary to their practices would have implied extreme criticism.

The agencies that formed a coalition against the Ahearn bill were organized in such a way that they could rapidly mobilize support, and each agency had the ability to appear at hearings and to testify. The State Charities Aid Association had full-time staff that could write letters, contact other agencies, influence people, and plan strategies. Legislators and public officials were used to hearing from and dealing with officials of the charitable organizations, whose connections with powerful philanthropists were well-known. Mayor Strong, a one-term "anti-corruption" Mayor in a city long ruled by corrupt Tammany politicians, had been helped into office by the very persons who also held membership on agency boards.

On the other hand, in 1897, there was no organization for mothers' pensions. At Mayor Strong's hearings in 1897 only two persons showed up to testify for the bill, a representative of Senator Ahearn, who didn't think that it was necessary to attend, himself; and a woman who said she represented nobody, and therefore had no power, and no voters to influence. The testimony of the bill's proponents focused only on why the current system was harmful. Rather than answer them, the proponents simply ignored the charitable organizations' predictions of dire consequences if the bill were passed. The testimony of the various representatives of the charitable organizations, on the other hand, while acknowledging that the break-up of families was to be avoided where possible, claimed that the solution was wrong, would be harmful to the persons involved and would be extremely costly to the public.

By virtue of their apparent expertise, their connections with the powerful, their relationships with legislators and public officials, and their logical follow-through, the arguments of the charitable organizations' officials carried more weight. It was not until later, when another faction of social workers joined in alliance with politicians and others to mount in an effort for mothers' pensions, that such legislation was successful.

## NOTES

1. The date of March 30, 1897 was reported in the Twenty-Fifth Annual Report of the State Charities Aid Association (Page 80). According to Homer Folks' article, "Proposed Legislation Concerning Children in New York," appearing in *The Charities Review* (July-August 1897), the legislation was introduced on March 13. The date of introduction of the Ahearn Bill is not available in the records of the New York State Legislature for 1897 because it was not signed into law.
2. Senator Ahearn's bill provided mothers' pensions only for the poor of New York City and not the State as a whole because such aid was available in the rest of the state through a system of outdoor public relief. Outdoor relief had been curtailed only in New York City.
3. "Scored the Ahearn Bill", *New York Times*, (July 22, 1897) p. 12.
4. "Parents' Compensation for Indigent Children; Senate Committee Hearing on Ahearn Bill", *New York Times*, February 9, 1898, Page 3.
5. According to librarians at the New York State Library, legislative records of the original hearings would not have been preserved since the bill never became law.
6. *New York Times*, June 5, 1895, page 8, column 3; June 6, 1895, page 2, column 4.
7. *New York Times*, March 4, 1894, page 13; January 1, 1896, page 9; January 5, page 17; January 10, page 10; January 14, page 9; January 25, page 9; January 28, page 10; February 4, page 16; February 11, page 10; February 23, page 17; February 25, page 16; February 28, page 9; March 19, page 9; March 20, page 9; March 26, page 2; March 27, page 8; September 3, page 16; June 19, 1897, page 2; October 7, page 4.
8. *New York Times*, June 19, 1897, page 1; June 20, page 12.
9. *New York Times*, April 1, 1897, page 1.
10. *New York Times*, November 29, 1894, page 1.
11. *New York Times*, August 6, 1896, page 3.
12. *New York Times*, May 18, 1898, page 12; May 19, page 14.
13. Estimates of the actual number of children placed vary. While Thurston estimated that the number of children placed from 1853 through 1929 was 31,081, Langsam (*Children West*, 1964) reported

- 85,292 children placed. Her figures were taken directly from the annual reports of the Society.
14. *Laws of 1875*, Chapter 173.
  15. Opposing organizations included the Charity Organization Society; the State Charities' Aid Association; the Society of St. Vincent de Paul; and the New York State Board of Charities.
  16. "Letter to the President of the United States Embodying the Conclusions of the Conference on the Care of Dependent Children," *Proceedings of the Conference on the Care of Dependent Children*, 1909, pp. 192-197; as found in Bremner, *Children*, 2:365-366.
  17. *Proceedings of the Conference on the Care of Dependent Children*, 1909, pp. 41-53, reprinted in Bremner, *Children*, 2:363.

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MINNEAPOLIS SETTLEMENT HOUSES IN THE  
"NOT SO ROARING 20'S"  
AMERICANIZATION, MORALITY, AND THE  
REVOLT AGAINST POPULAR CULTURE

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*The article traces the theoretical and ideological development of the Minneapolis settlement house community during the 1920's. As such, the article examines the social control function of Minneapolis settlements through their emphasis on Americanization, morality, the concepts of neighborhood and democracy, and the role of domestic politics within the settlement community. The article also explores the dialectical relationship between the social control function of Minneapolis settlement houses and the altruistic motives of settlement workers.*

The majority of literature on American social settlements focus on the larger houses (i.e., Hull House, Chicago Commons, University Settlement, South End House, etc.) located in highly populated metropolitan areas. Moreover, the bulk of the literature also emphasizes the "golden epoch of settlements," the progressive era from 1905 to 1919 (Davis, 1967; Bremner, 1956; Trattner, 1979). Consequently, little attention has been paid to the smaller settlements that were less flamboyant, but nevertheless formed the backbone of the settlement movement that spanned the distance from New York to California.

This article examines the Minneapolis settlement house community from 1920 to 1929. The Minneapolis settlement houses existed in a somewhat typical, middle-range, middle-western city. Unlike some of the larger settlement



houses, Minneapolis settlements were far from being bastions of progressivism, nor were they populated with noted personalities such as Jane Addams, Robert Woods, Graham Taylor, or Mary Simkhovitch. Like the vast majority of settlement houses, Minneapolis settlements existed outside of the national limelight<sup>1</sup>

#### A BRIEF NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this article is historical sociology. Consequently, the intent of this article is interpretative rather than purely historical. The point of this paper is not to concisely record the development of the Minneapolis settlement house community of the 1920's, but instead, to examine the role of ideology and social control as they impacted upon the settlement milieu. As part of that examination, emphasis will be placed on the role of social control within the Minneapolis settlements and the translation of that social control function into Americanization programs, and later, into an almost messianic emphasis on morality.

The complementarity between history and sociology is evident. However, like all methodologies it suffers from inherent traps. Primary among those traps is sociological reductionism, that is, the subordination of important variables for other, less important variables. For example, there exists the danger of distorting the altruistic motives of settlement leaders by subordinating those motives to ideological concerns. This would suggest that settlement leaders were merely an arm of capital rather than willful actors who were acted upon as well as acted upon the system in which they existed.

The definition of social control used in this paper will follow Coser and Rosenberg's (1957;97) explication which states that social control is "those mechanisms by which society exercises dominion over component individuals and enforces conformity to its norms".

The use of ideology in this article corresponds to Althusser's (1971:152) notion that it is "a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence". In that sense, "men represent their real condi-

tions of existence to themselves in an imaginary form" (Althusser, 1971:153). Moreover, ideologies are not a static and hegemonous series of suppositions about the world, but instead, they represent ongoing social processes.

## THE BACKGROUND OF THE EARLY SETTLEMENT MOVEMENT

The early settlement house movement in the United States was marked by a benign form of paternalism characteristic of progressive era thinking (Rothman, 1980). By the early 1920's, at least in Minneapolis, that paternalism gave way to a more strident view of the role of settlement houses in meeting societal goals. The genesis of that shift lay in the social and political milieu of post World War I America.

The triumph of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia, the spread of communist ideology into Germany, Hungary, and other parts of Europe, and especially the founding of the Third International (created in Moscow to stimulate worldwide proletarian revolution), set off an unprecedented wave of anti-red hysteria in the United States.

According to Clarke Chambers, (1967:117) the Red Scare "hurt the settlements more than other reform associations or welfare agencies because they had been so long associated with an open-forum policy hospitable to the expression of all kinds of economic and political theories by all sorts and conditions of social dissenters". Jane Addams noted that "any proposed change was suspect, even those efforts that had been considered praiseworthy before the war". Minnesota and Minneapolis were not immune from the political schisms that marked the 1920's. Long controlled by the large grain companies, Minneapolis was known as an anti-union and "open shop" town well into the 1930's (Stipanovich, 1982:165).

The nativistic and racial supremacy theories of the 1920's was also evident in Minneapolis. In 1923, historian Theodore C. Blegen (Stipanovich, 1982:24) estimated that there were over ten Klu Klux Klan chapters in Minneapolis.

Prohibition also had a significant impact on Minneapolis. Long a central distribution center for commerce in

the upper midwest, Minneapolis provided the perfect distribution point for illegal whiskey bound for Kansas City and Chicago. The illegal trade resulted in an increase in corruption and gangland activities (Stipanovich, 1982:170).

Minneapolis history is replete with its own set of contradictions. Settled by New Englanders in the 1869's and 1870's, the National Grange of the Patrons of Industry had a branch in Minnesota. In the 1880's the Farmers Alliance, later to become the People's Party, was established in Minnesota. The ire of the farmers was directed against the railroads, grain millers, the grain exchange, and the banks (Stipanovich, 1982:157-8). Since Minneapolis was the seat of commerce for the upper midwest, much of the protest focused on the city.

Minneapolis also fell sway to the anti-red hysteria of World War I. The Minneapolis Committees on Public Safety arrested leaders of the International Workers of the World (IWW) and the socialist party. In fact, the Minneapolis activities against the IWW spurred on the national campaign against the organization (Stipanovich, 1982:165). The Committees also attacked the Non-Partisan League, an organization founded in North Dakota in 1915 by Arthur Townley. The Non-Partisan League later became the Farmer-Labor Party, and in 1930, successfully ran Floyd B. Olson as governor of Minnesota.

In the midst of the political confusion that marked national and state politics, Minneapolis settlement houses were asked to ply their trade. The settlements responded with programs intended to protect the immigrant against injustice and to uphold the order of American society. Both of these goals could be incorporated under the umbrella of Americanization.

#### THE "AMERICANIZATION" MOVEMENT WITHIN THE MINNEAPOLIS SETTLEMENT HOUSE COMMUNITY

The Americanization movement that characterized Minneapolis settlement activities through the middle 1920's was

not a specific set of programs, but rather emphasized particular theoretical perspectives and ideologies. Americanization encompassed policies for education, financial aid, and oftentimes merely a sympathetic understanding of the difficulties faced by the immigrant family.

The Americanization movement, spearheaded by the settlement houses, spanned the years from the 1890's to the middle 1920's. Though originated as a humanitarian impulse motivated by charity and Social Christianity, Americanization later developed into a "100% American" crusade driven by nativism, racism and fear; and by the early 1920's Americanization meant conforming for the sake of social unity (Bolin, 1969:2). The primary thrust of the Americanization movement was on developing a sense of patriotism and loyalty. These themes were stressed repeatedly from the onset of World War I to the middle 1920's. An example of the intolerance and nativism that characterized the core of the Americanization movement can be found in a correspondence between Margaret Chapman, head resident of Wells Memorial House and Mrs. Belousoff, a former infant welfare nurse who returned to Petrograd after the Russian Revolution of 1917 (*St. Mark's Outlook*, Dec. 22 1917:2). Mrs. Belousoff wrote:

The Country is going to economical destruction in full meaning of these words. Every day brings troubles. Country is all lighten up with murders, robbing and many other things of the same type. But we are Russian—still talking. Our leaders do not feel, or probably do not want to see, what will happen with Russia if things will go longer this way. Sometimes I think our Allies will take care of us . . .

In responding to Mrs. Belousoff's letter, Chapman (*St. Mark's Outlook*, March 19, 1917:45) wrote:

The most offensive and dangerous thing with which this nation is confronted, is the wicked disloyalty of those who have come from foreign parts, only to abuse our institutions and to seek to disrupt our national family life . . . The best possible

is not to interne them, or to place limitations upon their movements but, to ship them back to the countries from whence they came . . . We have been altogether too lenient, too soft and gentle, in dealing with the traitor within our gates. We shall do so no more we hope.

The Americanization movement did not reflect Jane Addams' view of tolerance of sharing, but rather, a militant pro-Americanism tinged with anti-internationalism and a virulent distrust of "foreign ideas". The goal of Americanization is summed by a brief article in *St. Mark's Outlook* (March 10, 1917:5).

Some time ago Mrs. T.B. Wells gave us a great table talk on "Nationalism". The next week when a young woman came register for gym and was asked her nationality, she said: "I used to say I was a Scandinavian, but since hearing Mrs. Wells I know I am an American."

Americanization was also the principle focus for Robbins Gilman, head resident of North East Neighborhood House (2). Within the community of northeast Minneapolis, Americanization, at least until the middle 1920's, was an omnipresent force. Nearly every activity at the house including social clubs, the employment bureau, the day nursery and kindergarten, the health programs, and the war time activities, were considered as adjustment programs for the immigrant. Gilman's (Headworkers Report, January, 1919, North East Neighborhood House (hereafter NENH) Papers:4) statement that "all the work done at North East Neighborhood House was Americanization work", was well founded.

In 1919, Robbins Gilman founded the North East Americanization Committee, an organization composed of social workers, public school principals, and other leaders of the First Ward (Headworkers Report, May 1919, NENH:1).

The principle activities of the North East Americanization Committee consisted of a series of weekly lectures held at the St. Anthony Commercial Club, as well as various folk dance festivals and choral presentations. The objective of the committee was to help Americans understand their immig-

rant neighbors by teaching them about old world customs, national heroes, and other aspects of immigrant life. An additional purpose of the committee was to show native Americans that the foreigner was not a bolshevist, but a person with something to offer American culture (Gilman:831).

Despite Gilman's pronouncements that the North East Americanization Committee had as its guiding principle the "contributions theory of immigration", a la Jane Addams, (1911a: 39-41; 64-66), this progressive view was not centrally shared. A northeast Minneapolis paper, the *North East Argus*, (NENH, February 1, 1919) editorialized that the "Americanization Movement, which will soon be in Full Swing all over this fair land of ours, will promptly take care of sporadic attempts to 'pull off' any Bolsheviki nonsense in this country, or in this city".

Gilman saw his main role as being that of an interpreter of American values and institutions to the foreign born. Anna Quayle, assistant head resident of Wells House, agreed with Gilman (*St. Mark's Outlook* June 12, 1920:9) when she maintained that the main goal of the settlements was to perform the "rare function of a minister of understanding or as if often said, interpreter".

#### THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND DEMOCRACY: SHAPING IDEOLOGY THROUGH MANUFACTURING A WORLD VIEW

The unification of disparate neighborhood elements was a chief component in the Americanization plan of the Minneapolis settlement houses. For example, above the door at North East Settlement House was a sign which read: "Organized to weld a cosmopolitan neighborhood into an Americanized civic and social unit".

The "neighborhood movement" was an attempt to remediate the social evils that came on the heels of urban industrialization. These social evils included autonomy (i.e. extreme individualism and the license to break group norms), immorality, and the sense of anomie that characterized urban life. Settlement work was an attempt to

make the anonymous city dweller into a franchised citizen.

Group life was seen as the cure for excessive individualism and social instability. Strong groups could control individualistic impulses and encourage people to value their ties with each other.

The creation of group life was based on strengthening the family, the school, the playground gang, the club, the vocational or labor group, the ethnic group, and the neighborhood group. A major goal of that strategy was the creation of a strong and unified neighborhood system which could be called into service to enforce social order. This unified neighborhood could thus meliorate the twin features of autonomy; license (the inability of the group to exert restraint on its members), and selfishness (the weakening of people's devotion to their reference group).

The creation of a tightly woven social organism also serves another social control function. Namely, when a neighborhood is tightly organized, social control is more easily applied by an extant force. The solidification of a community insures that the social entity that wishes to control the community has a viable leadership to negotiate with, and ultimately, to use in its service. Without unity, a community becomes harder to control, with disparate elements running amok under no one's reins. By stressing neighborhood unity, the settlements struggled to create a social organism that was tightly structured and well organized, and hence, a neighborhood that could be more easily managed by the forces of the state. Thus a tightly organized neighborhood was a crucial strategy in the Americanization program of the Minneapolis settlement houses. The relationship between the concepts of "neighborhood" and "democracy" was another crucial part of the settlements' Americanization program.

## DEMOCRACY AND IDEOLOGY

The notion of democracy, or the idea that liberty and law go together, was a mainstay of the settlement house

movement. The belief in the value of democracy was a quintessential element in the program of Americanization.

Neighborhood involvement was a lesson in civics: when neighborhood problems were successfully resolved, immigrants learned that change could occur through voting or other political activity. Apart from the obvious social function of "policing the community", civic involvement also ensured that neighborhood people would focus on the political rather than the economic arena. By focusing on community problems, there was less propensity for neighborhood residents to concentrate on the economic inequities and, thereby, less chance of them becoming affiliated with radical organizations. The focus on community problems allowed the immigrant to vent his or her economic frustration on relatively safe targets: corrupt city officials or inept municipal administrations.

Political choices have always been relatively limited in American Political life. Except in rare instances, few viable non-mainstream political candidates have emerged. Thus, by socializing the immigrant into accepting the available political choices, settlement workers promulgated the desired ideology of democracy. Through their actions, settlement workers helped manufacture the social reality of the immigrant, a reality that was to be bounded by the conventions of the American economic system.

Socializing the immigrant into the democratic mode of thought was done not only through the informal mechanism of neighborhood involvement, but also through more formal means of political education. Pillsbury House maintained a "well-attended class in political education" (*Minneapolis Tribune*, February 13, 1921), and North East House sponsored a citizenship class where "the men of foreign birth learned English and the principles of the American government" (*Minneapolis Journal* Circa 1923). Unity House contributed to the democratic socialization of the immigrant by providing a social evening in which "Mr. Emmanuel Cohen and Mr. J.C. Haynes . . . Spoke in such a way as to enlist



the attention of working men on such topics as 'Good Citizenship' and 'City government' " (*Minneapolis Tribune*, February 13, 1921).

The combination of neighborhood involvement and formal political education ensured the immigrant would be well exposed to the precepts of democracy and civic responsibility.

Many citizens of the 1920's saw a strong relationship between Americanization and morality. As nativism became tinged with racism, there was a strong tendency to associate Americanism with morality. This proclivity was fueled by the belief that assimilation was weakening the genetic stock of Americans, and thus, any signs of social weakness, e.g. crime or immorality, was interpreted as being "unAmerican" (Grant, 1916). It therefore became important for settlement houses to protect the immigrants from moral temptation.

Though the shift in emphasis from Americanization to moralism should not be exaggerated—both programs continued throughout the 1920's and well into the 1930's—there was indeed a marked change in the focus of settlement activity. In fact, the emphasis on virtue would accelerate, until by the end of the decade, it would reach almost the proportion of a moral crusade.

#### MORALITY, WOMEN, AND THE REVOLT AGAINST POPULAR CULTURE

World War I ushered in a re-examination of the evil of alcohol. Unity House, under Henry Burt, "organized the local communities for suppression of vice and stimulate(d) public officials in making effective the restrictions of the War Department on the social evil and the sale of liquor" (*Minneapolis Tribune*, September 11, 1917). Wells Memorial House had the same concern as Unity House when Margaret Chapman (*St. Mark's Outlook*, October 20, 1917:6) wrote that the hygienic atmosphere surrounding our soldiers and sailors may be morally looked after by educational propaganda of local organizations in relation to both the social

evil and the sale of liquor". When prohibition was finally enacted after World War I, every settlement house in Minneapolis endorsed it (*Minneapolis Tribune*, February 19, 1919).

After prohibition the moral concerns of settlement houses shifted to other areas. Destructive social influences were enumerated by a Women's Cooperative Alliance report on north Minneapolis. This 1925 report listed destructive social influences as "pool halls, dance halls, soft drink parlors, motion picture theatres, gangs (with possible causes of delinquency being small stores, hangouts, sale of cigarettes), lumber yards, vacant lots, dumps, prostitution, and sale and manufacture of intoxicating liquor" (Pratt, 1925:1).

Although the Women's Cooperative Alliance was not officially connected to the settlement movement, Minneapolis settlement houses were also investigating the same issues (3).

The moral concerns of the Minneapolis settlements were, in part, a reaction to the materialism and popular culture of the 1920's. Margaret Chapman, head resident of Wells Memorial House, (*St. Mark's Outlook*, January 3, 1925:9) wrote:

Yes, I know, my dear Materialist, the newspapers have recorded, daily, the doings of the wicked world and its sinning mortals—thefts, disloyalties, hypocrisies, villainies, murders. It has been a tragic review of God's children gone away from him.

The post World War I decade had ushered in a moral revolution. Young men and women from all social classes triumphantly celebrated the liberation of sex from its Victorian constraints. This liberation took the form of a new mass culture of movies, dance halls, amusement centers, cafes and clubs. The sexual familiarity bred by this new cultural perspective frightened the upright and moral guardians of social order. Popular culture encouraged romantic courting, and especially, cross-class mixing. It removed sex from its reproductive and familial context. Moreover, doctors, psy-

chologists, and popular advice literature advocated open sexuality between husband and wife and the value of loving companionship. While pre-marital intercourse was still taboo, there emerged a greater tolerance toward general sexual activity so long as it was based on the prospect of marriage. It was these social forces acting in concert with each other, that from the perspective of class based reformers, threatened the social order and American society.

Northeast Minneapolis had the unseemly distinction of having the second highest juvenile delinquency rate in Minneapolis (Gilman papers, Box 50, NENH, 1925:39-49). In Gilman's view this crime wave was largely due to the destructive influences of motion picture theaters, bowling alleys, pool halls, soft drink parlors, and dance halls. This commercialized recreation, according to Gilman, accounted for 90-95% of the anti-social actions of youth (Headworkers Report, November 1930, NENH).

At the root of the settlements' revolt against popular culture lay the notion of "domestic politics" (Chapman, 1984). The development of domestic ideology—or the "cult of domesticity", "true womanhood", and "women's sphere", as this ideology was alternatively labeled in nineteenth century American—served as a basis for "sisterhood" and for women's perception of their moral imperative to reform society and challenge the assumptions of male political and social culture (Cott, 1977; Epstein, 1981).

According to Richard Chapman (1984:2), the settlement houses were built on a tradition that connected "domesticity" to women's reform activities. Chapman (1984:2) maintained that:

... the settlement house movement—which emerged in late nineteenth century American cities—provided an institutional outlet and an organizational base whereby middle-class women expressed an urbanized form of domestic politics seeking social and political change.

That the settlement movement was heavily influenced by intellectual women reformers appears to be indisputable. John Rousmaniere (1970:45-66) maintains that the settlement

movement provided a socially approved philanthropic avenue for educated women who wanted to pursue a career rather than marriage. He further suggests that the settlements created a colony for the reconstruction of familiar ideological ties as well as a social home for young college women confused by a hostile social world. This colony provided a haven, in many ways, similar to the safe haven provided by the women's colleges from which they graduated.

The "calling" that was a part of the attraction of women reformers to the settlement movement encouraged a special concern for women's problems. Gilman showed a sensitivity to mothers' problems when he described the matron of the day nursery. He wrote (Headworkers Report, 7th Annual Report, NENH, 1921:2) that "her larger function is a deep human, sympathetic understanding of the causes back of the needs in the lives of the mothers". Unity house showed a similar sensitivity to women's problems when its headworker maintained that women often "break down when they are obliged to carry the load of day work and the care of the home and of the children" (*Year Book of the Church of the Redemer*, 1913, First Universalist Church:44).

It was this definition of the problems of women that gave rise to the day nurseries, kindergarten, day care, well baby clinics, mother's clubs, and the various other settlement activities geared to women's concerns.

Another aspect of domestic politics was that of scientific home-making; the natural, efficient, well-ordered and nurturing modern household. In effect, this movement was in part designed to create the ideal working class woman. An article in the *Minneapolis Tribune* (December 26, 1916) exemplified the perfect woman:

She washes and irons and does housecleaning for daily wages . . . Between these 9-hour working days, she scrubs and keeps clean her little home; she mends rips in Helen's and Gena's dresses and sews patches on Tony's and Paul's and Johnny's pants. She is our ideal . . . because she refuses charity. It is this that makes her great. She epitomizes the Spirit of America: Independence, Self-Help.

Domestic science was in itself class based: Middle class women taught working women how to run efficient and well-managed homes. It was perhaps this kind of irony that led Alice Kessler-Harris (1982:119) to write (in relation to women reformers) that: "Released from the home by their privileged class position . . . (they) . . . spent their best efforts trying to convince less privileged women to perform housework more productively and child care more efficiently."

The settlement's emphasis on domestic politics was tied to its perceived responsibility to family life. In Minneapolis, F.A. Gross, Director of the German American Bank (*St. Mark's Outlook*, January 26, 1924:12), observed that "you cannot legislate people into being moral or temperate . . . the home is the place where character is made . . . (Wells Memorial House) in all enterprises is immediately related to homemaking and family life".

The analogy between the settlement house and the mother was often noted by settlement writers. In almost metaphysical terms, the neighborhood was the family and the settlement house its mother. For example, Gilman wrote that "the Settlement philosophy is based upon the infinite love of the ideal mother with the strength and protection of the ideal father: (Gilman papers, Box 50, NENH, n.d.). This same analogy is in evidence when Pillsbury House described Miss Elizabeth Taylor, its head resident, as "a mother to the men and women, the boys and girls, and the babes; a very young mother, it is true, but the power and strength to carry burdens is not always due to age, is it?" (*Minneapolis Journal*, November 26, 1906:5).

The settlement leaders regarded the family as the quintessential element in positive group life. It was regarded so highly because of all the available institutions, the family alone had the most power to control selfishness and encourage conformity. It could train and control the individual because it had the power to envelope him. However, the settlements realized that the power of the family over the individual was weakened by social forces, among them commercial and popular culture. It was thus hoped that the revival

of strong neighborhood life could strengthen the disintegrating family, and as such, be a useful component in ensuring social stability.

### SOCIAL CONTROL AND ALTRUISM

To see the Minneapolis settlement house involvement in Americanization and morality based activities as pernicious, is to deny a central truth of the settlement phenomena. Namely, social control and altruism were inextricably woven into the complex fabric of the Minneapolis settlement movement of the 1920's.

For example, a statement by Robbins Gilman (Headworkers Report, NENH, December 11, 1918:4), head resident of North East Neighborhood House, exemplifies the altruism of the settlements. Gilman stated that, "those who live in settlements must be endowed with an abundant amount of Christian grace which is built upon the 'substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things no seen' . . . we live in a faith that what we do or what we stand for sometime, somehow, or somewhere may result in social good".

Quotes similar to Gilman's statement are common throughout the Minneapolis settlement house records. Altruism, sacrifice, charity, beneficence, and love are common settlement themes. These claims are by no means disingenuous; they in fact represent the firmly held beliefs and values of the settlement movement.

However, equally prominent was the social control function of the settlements. Although social control was of central concern to the Minneapolis settlement house community, its leaders did not perceive that function as malevolent. Settlement leaders engaged in social control activities not because they were pressured by the elite to perform that function, but instead, because they had a vision of social peace and harmony. In effect, settlement leaders believed that capitalism was reformable and that middle-class values were the backbone of the nation. Therefore, the engine that drove settlement leaders was a belief in social order, but also a strong commitment to selfless service. For settlement workers, the class conflict engendered by capitalism could be

eradicated by the proper application of concern, understanding, and love. Social harmony was perceived to be in everybody's best interests. To the 1920's settlement workers, the settlement mission was deeply rooted in altruism.

Within the Minneapolis settlement movement there existed a dichotomous relationship between social control and altruism. Apart from enforcing social control, Minneapolis settlements also provided positive social functions. For the newly arrived immigrant, settlements functioned as what Berger and Neuhaus (1977) call a "mediating structure". Like churches, voluntary organizations, and civic clubs, social settlement housed mediated between large impersonal institutions and alienated individuals. This mediation included intervening on the part of wronged workers, helping with naturalization, and working toward improved neighborhood services.

Although the conservative ambiance of the 1920's dampened the reform spirit of the Progressive era, it did not entirely overwhelm it. Even Margaret Chapman, the conservative head resident of Wells Memorial House, (*St. Mark's Outlook*, January 26, 1924:12) warned that:

. . . the situation is most serious and until men of your caliber all over the city use your influence and see to it that city officials are clean upright, fearless men, this young generation now growing up in the streets of the city will one day take the reins into their hands.

Moreover, even in the midst of strident declarations touting Americanism, Minneapolis settlement houses were able to maintain some components of Addams' "contributions theory of immigration". Mrs. C.C. Bovey (Box 1, NENH, Circa 1925:1), a longtime member of the Board of Directors of North East House, remarked that she "was so interested in foreigners with their many fine traditions and customs . . . we should absorb what they have to offer, just like they absorb what we have to offer . . .". Chapman (*St. Mark's Outlook*, January 26, 1924:12), in a justification of Americanization programs, maintained that "among the older groups of men and women, old time prejudices and

suspensions are being gradually forgotten in the real friendships that are being formed, thus making it less possible for the reactionary to appeal to sectarian differences”.

The complexity of the “moral crusades” and the Americanization programs is apparent. These settlement concerns were based on the protection of the social order, as well as the desire to protect the immigrant. If they were reactionary—as they obviously appear to be—they were undoubtedly less strident than the general sentiment of the native American population. By the 1920’s, Minneapolis settlement leaders were less shapers of their times than they were products of them. Though a bit more enlightened, settlement leaders were no different than the rest of the population. To judge the actions of settlement leaders in the 1920’s, apart from the general *Zeitgeist* of the period, is to pass judgment on them by our standards rather than theirs. In a decade characterized by the lynchings of blacks, intolerance for anything not wholly American, and a generally reactionary style that permeated all aspects of American life, the actions of the Minneapolis settlement movement, despite its blandness, might well be considered a triumph.

#### SUMMARY

The benign paternalism that marked Progressive era settlement work gave way to more strident techniques of social control in the 1920’s. As the article illustrates, the xenophic and nativistic tendencies of America surfaced as a response to World War I and the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. Fearful of an internal revolution, American society became less tolerant of foreign ideas and cultures, and consequently, demanded an uncompromising allegiance to what was perceived as Americanism. Settlement houses—in many ways a mirror of their times—responded to this challenge by working to create “100% Americans” out of their immigrant neighbors. The Americanization emphasis, while always present within settlement work, reached a new zenith from roughly 1919-1929.

The Americanization emphasis reached into every program and event sponsored by Minneapolis settlement



houses. This Americanization program was overarching, thorough, and almost punitive in its emphasis. Devoid of the tolerance that characterized Progressive era paternalism, Americanization programs were uncompromising in their demand for assimilation.

By the middle 1920's, Americanization activities of the settlements gave way to a mission designed to foster morality. The settlement's concern with morality was in part fueled by the rise of popular culture. The introduction of the automobile (with its concomitant opportunities for mobility), the advent of the motion picture and its portrayal of premarital romantic love, and the introduction of contemporary dancing and the physical familiarity that it bred, fundamentally challenged the religious and moral precepts upon which the settlement movement rested. The settlement's dedication to inculcating morality was, in effect, a response against the intrusion of popular culture into the life of the neighborhood.

Lastly, this article ties in early 20th century feminism to the fabric of the Minneapolis settlement community. This brand of feminism had its roots in the conservative view of domestic politics and was embedded within the belief in the sanctity of family life.

The genius of the settlement house movement was based on a 'marriage of conscience and convenience' (Rothman, 1980). On the one hand it met the real needs of the immigrant group. On the other hand, settlements met the needs of capital by helping to insure a stable social and economic climate. Essentially, the settlement movement was a bridge between the classes, and as such, was a way to help diminish the class conflict that was at the root of an unjust economic system.

This article has attempted to critically examine the general belief in the social justice function of the settlement movement. Through an emphasis on Americanization and morality, Minneapolis settlement houses exhibited a strong allegiance to the social control function of settlement work.

This allegiance to social control existed in a dialectical relationship with the altruistic motives of settlement workers. Specifically, Minneapolis settlement houses in the 1920's were not only servants of the immigrants, but also social control agents who enforced a social conformity, and engendered within the immigrant a belief in the American social, political, and economic system. In that sense, the mission of the settlement houses was to promulgate the ideological perspective of capitalism and to serve the plutocracy by working toward social harmony through minimizing both social conflict and the injustices of the American class-based economic system. Consequently, Minneapolis settlement leaders operated in the service of the plutocracy whose views they shared, and by whose charity they were able to maintain their organization. Despite their role as social control agents, Minneapolis settlement leaders were inspired by a motivation which was rooted in charity, altruism, and a love for the constituents that they served.

The settlement house movement is indeed a complex form of social service organization. It is replete with contradictions in both purpose and function. In short, a study of the Minneapolis settlement house movement defies a single answer in contrast to the complex questions that it poses.

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1) Throughout this article, quotes using incorrect grammar and punctuation were left as they appeared in the original sources.

2) References to North East Neighborhood House have been used extensively through this article. Apart from its excellent records, there is reason to suggest that it was one of the most respected settlement houses in the country. Albert Kenedy, in a report to the Council on Social Agencies (Report to the Survey Committee, 1923, United Way of Minneapolis Files, Box 1, General History Social Welfare History

Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis hereafter SWHA), stated that: "the work of the North East Neighborhood House, on the side of participation in the public life of the district ranks high. It is indeed in this respect, one of the best settlements in the country."

3) Throughout the 1920's, Catheryne Cooke Gilman (wife of Robbins Gilman, head resident of North East Neighborhood House) was the paid director of the Women's Cooperative Alliance.

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HARRY LURIE'S ASSESSMENT  
AND PRESCRIPTION:  
AN EARLY VIEW OF SOCIAL WORKERS'  
ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES  
REGARDING POLITICAL ACTION\*

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*Harry Lawrence Lurie's recommendations and analyses concerning social workers' involvement in political action are reviewed. By reviewing some of Lurie's concerns and activities from the 1930's into the 1950's in this area, it is possible to gain helpful guidance and insight into contemporary concerns about social workers in the political arena. Lurie argued consistently for greater involvement by social workers in political action as individuals, as members of professional organizations, and in coalition with other groups outside of social work who were concerned with progressive social change. Lurie also articulated many of the conditions preventing effective political action by social workers.*

INTRODUCTION

Harry Lawrence Lurie's many speeches, writings, and professional activities offer fertile ground for helping students of social work and social welfare history gain a more

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complete understanding of the complexities of the development of the social work profession from the 1920s into the 1960s. His beliefs, activities and concerns, however, also offer much of potential benefit to the non-historian social work practitioner or educator. By attending to his assessments and recommendations about social workers' proper roles in political action during his own era, social workers today can gain helpful insight. Lurie offers guidance on what leads to successful political involvement as well as what leads to failure and impotency for social workers in the political arena.

By looking at Lurie's concerns and recommendations in the context of the current socio-political environment it is possible to gain new perspectives in several areas of concern and controversy for many social workers today. In Lurie's assessments and recommendations one can find advice, for example, on the importance of broad-based coalition building in effective political action. This is a political strategy recommended by many contemporary social workers as an important means of increasing political effectiveness in service to social work goals and to the constituencies social workers serve (e.g., Amidei 1982, pp. 112-13; Haynes and Mickelson 1986, p. 70). In Lurie's work one can discover suggestions for becoming more effectively organized *within* the profession in order to improve political potency. Such contemporary efforts as PACE mirror some of Lurie's recommendations in this area. Lurie raised some important questions about the meager results of social work education in preparing social workers with skills and commitments necessary to be effective in political action. Contemporary educators and practitioners alike might do well to reconsider some of his concerns. The realization by some social workers today that many forces which run contrary to social work goals and values are much better organized and more skilled in effecting political change (e.g., Buffum and Haynes 1987) was also apparent to Lurie in his time. Lurie would have had much to offer to the current debate and controversy about the potential costs and benefits of moving toward

privatization of social welfare services and of vastly decreasing governmental responsibility for many of these services (e.g., Gilbert 1986; Abramovitz 1986). Social workers today, concerned that as a profession and as individual professionals we must become effective leaders in political action and the creation of social policy at all levels as demonstrated by efforts to make the National Center for Social Policy and Practice a reality, would find support for their efforts in the analyses and prescriptions of Harry Lurie.

Perhaps even more important than offering guidance in the more widely accepted contemporary issues and problem areas as those mentioned above, Lurie's assessment and activities also have much support to offer those who hold less widely accepted and more radical notions of political activism that call for social workers to be willing to go beyond traditional social work methodologies, political parties and processes when those methods, parties, and processes no longer respond to their needs and to those of their constituencies (e.g., Burghardt and Fabricant 1987, pp. 455-463). A model for individual commitment, involvement and risk-taking when necessary to effect political change such as nuclear arms reduction or to redress injustices such as political persecution can also be found in the activities of Lurie and some of his contemporaries.

### Lurie and His Beliefs

Harry Lawrence Lurie died in Ogunquit, Maine on June 25, 1973. His obituary appeared in the *New York Times* and offered a fitting and succinct summary of Lurie's professional activities and roles. He was referred to in the obituary as "a social worker, scholar, author and a founder and executive director of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds. . . . Mr. Lurie was a leader for half a century in social work in public and private agencies" (*New York Times* 1973).

In many of Harry Lawrence Lurie's professional activities which spanned more than four decades from the 1920s into the 1960s, he displayed and called for heightened politi-



cal awareness, involvement and skill on the part of social workers. He believed that such attributes were vitally important to the achievement of social work goals, but he also found them to be sorely lacking within the profession.

Harry Lurie believed that the roles and responsibilities of social work should extend far beyond those concerned with individual adjustment and social palliation. He believed that while these were necessary aspects of the social worker's responsibility, they were not the only, nor the most important, of the social worker's duties. Social workers were responsible, in addition, for social criticism and for social reconstruction directed toward removing the social and environmental barriers to individual well-being and security. Indeed, the social worker, in Lurie's eyes, was responsible not only for supporting progressive social changes instigated by other elements in society (such as labor) but the social worker was also responsible for being a salient force for such changes. It was not sufficient even for the social worker, then, to be a supporter and follower of progressive change; the social worker must be in the vanguard and play the role of leader in social change efforts, Lurie believed. In order to fulfill this responsibility, he maintained that the social worker must become intensely involved in organization and political action directed toward removing the root causes of individual malfunction and insecurity. The fact that social workers had been timid about and often were opponents of such actions was no excuse for continuing such a narrow and reactionary perspective, Lurie contended.

Throughout his career Lurie called upon social workers, as individuals, as members of their professional organizations, and as allies of other progressive movements and organizations to become involved in and indeed to lead, political action efforts. Lurie's career was marked by numerous examples of his own involvement, both as a participant, and as a leader, in political action efforts. Only a few selections from Harry Lurie's many writings and presentations have been used in this article. The selections have been carefully chosen to focus as specifically as possible on Lurie's

assessments and prescriptions in the areas of social work and political action. The selections have also been chosen to reflect chronologically the developments and continuities in Lurie's thoughts and actions in the area of political action during some of the most active years of his professional life.

### Lurie on Social Work and Political Action

In 1932, in response to the continuing and worsening Depression crisis, the American Association of Social Workers (AASW) Executive Committee appointed a Committee on Federal Action on Unemployment. Among its members was Harry Lurie (Fisher 1980, p. 71; Lurie 1933, p. 639).

In a report on the Committee's work given by Lurie in the June 1933 annual session of the National Conference of Social Work (NCSW), he pointed out that social workers had a responsibility to become involved in formulating constructive solutions to social problems, even when such formulations for change "become controversial issues between political parties and economic classes" (Lurie 1933, p. 639). If the social worker chose not to become involved in such political action, Lurie and the Committee contended in the report, the worker "thereby aligns himself with reactionary elements and with laissez-faire methods of social organization" (Lurie 1933, p. 639). Social workers clearly had the responsibility for involvement in change, and it was "desirable to go farther by taking the initiative in stimulating and sponsoring important legislative advances and extending our interest to a national program" (Lurie 1933, p. 640).

While Lurie was involved in efforts of professional social work organizations to influence political decision-making, he saw such efforts as being too infrequent and usually ineffective. He continued, however, to call consistently upon social workers and their organizations to counter national events and political decisions which he saw as detrimental to those most in need of social work services—the poor and the unemployed.

Lurie's response, for example, to such actions as the Roosevelt administration's dismantling of early New Deal

emergency programs was to call for political action to reverse the setbacks. Such political action was essential to halt and reverse these moves by what he viewed to be an increasingly reactionary national administration and Democratic party (Lurie 1934, p. 1-2). He called upon social workers in particular to become involved in political action. To him it was not optional, rather it was a responsibility of social workers, and to be passive or against progressive social welfare measures was reactionary and "tantamount to a criminal indifference to social needs" (Lurie 1935a, p. 1).

Lurie's impatience with social workers' timidity about getting involved in political activity to push for social welfare legislation was obvious. As he saw it, "social workers and social agencies, on the whole, have not played a conspicuous part in the development or promotion of broad programs of social legislation" (Lurie 1935b, p. 1). This was not only true, in his eyes, of individual social workers and their agencies, but their professional organizations were equally guilty. He pointed out specifically that the NCSW played no role at all and that the AASW discussed a program but had never formulated a detailed plan for such a social welfare program. He agreed that AASW had endorsed a few progressive issues such as federal responsibility for relief and that it had opposed the termination of federal relief responsibility. But he found the AASW to be vague in its position on the aims of social security, and it was, in his opinion, indifferent or negligent in the areas of housing and health. In addition, it lacked a definite position on labor standards and organization (Lurie 1935b, p. 1; Lurie 1937a; see also the brochure "An Institute on Modern Social Work Problems" 1937). He believed that there were a number of non-social work organizations which were far ahead in this area, such as the League of Women Voters, the AF of L, and the Federal Council of Churches of Christ. It was his disappointing conclusion that "as a whole, it may be stated that social workers and social agencies are timid, inactive and have conflicting opinions in this important field of effort" (Lurie 1935b, p. 2). In fact, he believed that social work was not only lax in pursuing social legislation, it was actually a

force against it: "Viewed as a whole, social work today is following a conservative role in social progress." As he put it, "inaction is a sign of acquiescence with the status quo" (Lurie 1935b, p. 2). It was his contention then, that social workers and their organizations could not choose to simply be uninvolved or neutral because in his eyes, "a passive social institution is a decaying institution" (Lurie 1935b, p. 3).

A large part of the reason that social work "as a whole" was playing "a conservative role in the social progress" and was not an active force for social reform through political action was due to its continued over-emphasis on casework, Lurie contended. The continued loyalty to casework as the dominant function of professional social workers presented, he believed, not only a problem for the profession as a whole, but was a "dilemma" for the individual social worker as well. (For a more detailed treatment of Lurie's views on the proper role of casework in social work see Schriver, "Harry Lurie's Critique: Person and Environment in Early Casework Practice," forthcoming in *Social Service Review*.) His position on casework, as it related to social workers' responsibilities in the area of political action, can perhaps best be summarized with the following quotation: "shall he [the social worker] continue to create, if he can, these little islands of security which may give some tangible expression to his effort or shall he plunge into the general turmoil and engage in the larger battle for social welfare" (Lurie 1935c, p. 14).

Lurie believed that for the individual social worker to be most effective in political action, or, as he described it, in "the larger battle for social welfare" would "require identification with a workers' movement, an organization of individual workers of all ranks and vocations seeking through political and economic means to place the whole of our common life under democratic control" (Lurie 1935c, p. 15). These comments emphasize the necessity he saw of uniting individual social workers and their organizations with other organizations seeking similar goals. Much of what Lurie had to say in this respect was founded on his faith in the capacity of the individual (in this case the individual social

worker) to play a substantive role in effecting needed change in spite of a tremendously unequal distribution of power. Lurie believed that through unity, organization, and political action the great power inequalities could be redistributed.

It seems to have been this belief that kept Lurie in the fight for what he believed was a better system of social organization. He doggedly refused to accept what he considered the continuing footdragging of many mainstream social workers and he continued to urge that social workers get involved in political action both to stop the backsliding of the New Deal accomplishments and to push for more comprehensive and basic answers to unemployment, insecurity, and social problems. In a paper he wrote in 1936 called, "Political Action for a Social Welfare Program," (Lurie 1936) he urged social workers to take the lead in creating and pursuing a platform of social welfare legislation even if that meant creating a third party to do it. By this time he no longer saw any real difference between the Republican and Democratic parties. Since they did not "deserve the support of intelligent social workers . . . we must turn to a new party, if necessary a minority party," he urged (Lurie 1936, p. 1).

Lurie was not naive, however idealistic he might have been, in his call for such a third party. In being more specific about the tactics and program of such a party, he displayed a good deal of pragmatism. In the first place, he admitted that there was at present no sign of such a party though he felt sure the demand for one would grow. He was also realistic in suggesting that such a party would need to be extremely careful not to alienate and frighten business interests to the point of complete disruption of the economic system (Lurie 1936, pp. 5-6).

Lurie stressed that an important role of social workers in such party efforts was to help develop political platforms that would include adequate social welfare programs to meet human needs (Lurie 1936, pp. 6-7). He believed that social workers must connect with and support parties which offered "the possibility of a constructive social order." Social

workers should not allow themselves to be put off by compromising "on the terms of a lesser evil." They must instead seek basic changes to improve social welfare, for "in a rapidly changing world, the future belongs to the idealist" (Lurie 1936, p. 7).

While Lurie was adamant that social workers must not compromise when it came to programs to adequately meet human needs, he also realized that they could not succeed in bringing about such programs alone. In fact, in a lecture in an April 1937 series he delivered in Los Angeles at "An Institute on Modern Social Work Problems" (1937) he noted for example, that because of social workers' connections primarily to groups who are resistant to change (i.e. conservative private philanthropists), or to groups without sufficient power to effect change (i.e. the poor), "The more advanced proposals for social legislation" came largely as a result of the efforts of groups other than social workers (Lurie 1937a, p. 1). Because of this, Lurie stressed the need for social workers to align themselves "with progressive forces in labor and in politics" (Lurie 1937a, p. 2). In another lecture in the series which he called "Organized Labor and Social Welfare," (Lurie 1937b) he concentrated specifically on the growing role of the labor movement in social welfare and political action. He noted that the increasing interest in the area was "based upon an awakening philosophy of the close relationship of economic and political action" (Lurie 1937b, p. 1).

As the New Deal years continued to pass and international events surrounding World War II began to take precedence over purely domestic concerns, it became more difficult for Lurie to (as he put it), keep his "mind on the limited field of social work" (Lurie 1938). He continued, though, to urge his social work colleagues to remain politically active. In a 1941 paper presented to the NCSW he urged social workers to attend to "Social Action [as] a Motive Force in Democracy" (Lurie 1941). In the paper he outlined, defined, and made recommendations for an enlarged, but realistic role for social workers in social/political action.

He reasoned that "when established social institutions and legal relationships are challenged and transformed by the emergence of new cultural, economic, and political phenomena, the process and the results may be called social action" (Lurie 1941, p. 631). Likely in reference to the then current world situation he noted that war and civil strife were the most destructive and most rapid forms of social action. It was his contention that social work sometimes influenced the changing of social processes through social action, but not very often. The tendency of social work was instead to approve social action in the past or future, but not to be involved in it in the present. He saw some rather obvious reasons for social workers not being directly involved in ongoing efforts to bring social change. These reasons were bound up in what Lurie (1941, pp 631–32) believed was the basic conservatism of social work which was in turn rooted in the nature of the conservative, voluntary, private, philanthropic sponsorship of social work efforts. He believed that while, in theory, necessary social changes could come through voluntary action, in practice the people who controlled material resources had not been willing to make the decision to bring about needed changes. As a result, he contended that most major social changes had come through government action. He offered as examples the abolition of slavery, the acceptance of labor's right to organize, income taxes, women's suffrage and social security (Lurie 1941, p. 633).

Lurie (1941, p. 633) contended that another reason that social workers had not been in the forefront of social changes brought about through political action, was one of skill. He argued that because of their historical experiences largely in the private sector, social workers were simply better at persuading wealthy contributors to support voluntary and thus more conservative actions than they were at political action to bring about social change through government actions with its potential for being less conservative.

Because social workers looked to the same conservative interests for support of their efforts, they were hesitant to be seen as advocating causes which could be controversial or

might run contrary to those represented by their benefactors: "Knowing of the overt or latent opposition to less conservative measures, we are uneasy about proposals that may be charged with having a pinkish tinge or are definitely considered to be an outgrowth of radical movements" (Lurie 1941, p. 636).

Lurie (1941, pp. 636–7) also found a partial explanation for social workers' impotence in social/political action in the fact that conservative forces in society were much better organized than progressive interests. He reasserted that the only hope for bringing about the substantive changes he felt necessary was for the progressive/radical forces to organize to counteract and overcome the superior organization of the conservative forces. In this effort he believed the social worker, in alliance with other progressive forces, should play a significant role. He contended that:

Within the ranks of organized labor, among groups of professionals and intellectuals who are able to advance beyond the basic ideologies of their class, and in the undercurrent of popular dissatisfaction with the lack of essential economic progress there is a potential base for popular strength that can become a counterweight to conservative opposition. . . . We have the difficult task of enlisting these natural allies without frightening the other elements (Lurie 1941, pp. 637–38).

To exercise such influence meant, to Lurie, going against considerable odds. Social workers must realize, he cautioned, that

organized pressures, especially from groups that have traditional prestige, are more important influences than real expressions of popular opinion. We have not yet learned how to make the views of a hundred thousand unknown individuals equal the weight of a single identifiable conservative leader who speaks for a fraction of that number. One of the perennial shortcomings of legislators is that they do not seem to know how to count (Lurie 1941, p. 639).

Lurie believed that political action to accomplish social work goals had the greatest chance of success when it resulted from broad-based and disciplined organization of social workers and others with similar interests. He, however



also recognized that social workers, for a variety of reasons, several of which have been discussed here, were a long way from such broad-based and disciplined organization. He recognized that it was not only the superior organization of conservative forces which was to blame for social workers' failures in the area of political action, but he also pointed out that "party and group discipline is alien to social work. We seem to be the true rugged individualists" (Lurie 1941, p. 639). Lurie (1941, p. 640) concluded that given this reality

social action, to be effective, must be an organized salient within social work and that it must free itself sufficiently from the general body to engage in militant action without the impediment of carrying the entire group along with it. Obviously, a successful movement requires that we enlist as large a part of the field as we can reasonably secure without destroying the essential core of our program. Social action, large or small, depends upon popular approval, since it represents some desired action on the part of the majority in an agency or in a community.

Once again, it is possible to see Lurie's efforts to balance the need for broad-based, unified action with the reality that we would have to settle for and work from considerably less than total agreement and completely unified action.

An example of Lurie's efforts to put into operation his notions about a "salient" within social work capable of decisive action without the necessity of obtaining unanimous agreement from the entire organization can be found in his involvement beginning in 1945 with the National Committee on the Human Aspects of Reconversion (NCHAR). The Committee was an interdisciplinary effort to prepare for a return to a peace time economy in anticipation of the war's end. Lurie was a Vice-Chairperson of the Committee. In his words

the Committee on the Human Aspects of Reconversion [h]as set up as its first order of business, the assembling of information from the social work and religious fields on the human aspects of reconversion and the use of this information as quickly as possible in support of the unemployment compen-

sation bill which seeks to extend unemployment compensation in the various states on the basis of payments of \$25 per week for a 26-week period. (Lurie 1945, p. 1)

During the same period Lurie was also involved in the Social Actions Committee and was a member of its Steering Committee. The Social Actions Committee was related to and financially supported the NCHAR (Lurie 1945, p. 1; King 1945). Both Committees were formed to carry out political action. The NCHAR was more interdisciplinary in its inclusion of the "religious field" and its purposes were more specifically related to lobbying for President Truman's Re-conversion programs. The Social Actions Committee was more broadly directed and was made up solely of social workers interested in political action. It was an ad hoc committee and was purposely formed to be outside the formal structure of the mainstream NCSW and AAWS organizations. Lurie explained the reason for its ad hoc and independent structure: "I am of the opinion that an ad hoc committee of individuals can move more quickly than an instrument which has to represent officially an organized body set up for various other purposes" (Lurie 1945, p. 1). This had long been a criticism of Lurie's about both mainstream professional associations, and especially about the AASW.

Still another component of the problems Lurie saw in social workers' lack of skill, involvement and success in political action efforts, was in their education. In 1946, in a paper titled "The Next Twenty-Five Years," Lurie addressed the educational preparation of social workers. In the paper, he noted that current social work education was much broader than what had been available to social work "pioneers." It now included a broad general undergraduate education as well as graduate education including "special techniques required in social case work, public welfare, group work, social agency administration and community organization" (Lurie 1946, p. 4).

Given this broad preparation, Lurie wondered why so many social workers still chose "the limited areas of our techniques in dealing with individual maladjustment" rather

than the broader areas of concern such as "economic, social and political organization" (Lurie 1946, pp. 4-5). He believed such a limited view of social work "results in an indifference or even antagonism toward some social workers who still feel that social work has a real contribution to make to political action" (Lurie 1946, p. 5).

Lurie also continued to be involved in a variety of political action efforts into the 1950s. These activities included his involvement as one of many prominent signers in the Spring of 1949 of an "Open Letter to the President and the Congress of the United States" (1949) urging an end to the Cold War. The signers urged that negotiations and reciprocal understanding replace the fear and hostility characterized by the arms race. Other signers of the letter included Wayne McMullen, Bertha Reynolds, Mary Van Kleeck—all social workers—as well as Linus Pauling, Lee J. Cobb, Aaron Copeland, W.E.B. DuBois, Robert S. Lynd, Arthur Miller and Scott Nearing ("Open Letter to the President and the Congress" 1949). In addition, Lurie was involved in efforts to aid a college professor in the early 1950s who had fallen victim to McCarthyism and anti-communist hysteria (Tandy 1953). These activities are only two later examples of Lurie's willingness to become personally involved throughout his career in political action efforts to aid individuals as well as in support of more broad-based efforts to bring about social and political change.

### Conclusion

Lurie's support for and involvement in political action to accomplish social work goals throughout his career, serve as useful reminders that while controversial and often unsuccessful in terms of results, political action has long had supporters of its rightful place within social work, though those supporters have been a minority in the field. In the sociopolitical climate of today, more social workers and our organizations might do well to heed these reminders.

Lurie's call for and demonstration of social worker involvement in the political arena is especially important because of its comprehensive and activist nature. He recognized that in order for social workers to be effective in the

use of political action it must flow through all aspects of our professional lives. Individually and collectively, through both education and practice, as actions of social workers as members of a distinct profession and in coalition with other progressive groups, Harry Lurie called for us to be politically aware and active. Only in this way did he believe we could fulfill our professional responsibilities to those we serve.

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# ORGANIZATIONAL ADAPTATION: THE NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION

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*This study examines the effect that bureaucratic attributes and the dual function of the National Urban League (NUL) had on its ability to respond quickly to New Deal programs and legislation. With the exception of its decentralized structure, bureaucratic attributes contributed to the organization's effectiveness. Its structure limited its ability to implement national programs and pressure for national policies. The NUL was unable to make a permanent change in its structure that would be more compatible with its targets. Its dual function, attempting to change individual behavior and societal institutions, helped it maintain a support base without becoming more conservative.*

The National Urban League (NUL) was founded in 1910 in response to the problems experienced by the large number of urban black Americans who had migrated from rural to urban areas seeking jobs and a better life. Throughout its history the NUL has been a major national black organization, providing leadership and a broad range of resources to help the urban black population make social and economic advancements. The NUL believed that if given an equal opportunity, the black population could compete successfully with other groups in the country. Unemployment and discriminatory employment policies were seen as major impediments to the advancement of black Americans. Its motto, "not alms but opportunity," is illustrative of these concerns.

Prior to the Great Depression, the NUL concentrated on vocational education and the expansion of job opportunities



for black workers in the private sector. Efforts to combat pervasive job discrimination were done on an almost case-by-case basis. The NUL, through its Vocational Opportunity Campaigns and through personal contacts, tried to persuade potential employers to give black workers the opportunity to prove that they could be efficient, honest, and reliable employees. The League rejoiced when it was able to help a black worker become "the first" black milkman in a city or "the first" black office clerk for a major business (NUL Papers, 1930a; Weiss, 1974; Parris and Brooks, 1971).

In 1933, with few private sector jobs available and with the New Deal administration creating work and work-relief programs for the unemployed, the NUL turned its attention to helping black workers make gains through government programs and new legislation. However, the NUL thought it would be necessary to make some basic changes within the organization if it was to respond effectively to the changes occurring in its external environment.

This article analyzes the ability of the organization to make these changes by examining two inter-related qualities of the NUL: (1) its bureaucratic attributes and (2) its dual function. These organizational characteristics enhanced and limited the adaptive capacities of the NUL during a turbulent historical period, the Great Depression. This study relies on primary source data, the NUL Papers and *Opportunity*, the official organ of the NUL.

### Bureaucratic Attributes

Robert Michels' theory, "the iron law of oligarchy," indicates a natural tendency for organizations to become more bureaucratic because a weak bureaucracy is more vulnerable to the external environment. However, as an organization becomes more bureaucratic, it becomes less compatible with its social change goals. It avoids controversial issues because it does not want to alienate its supporters. The organization becomes more conservative and more oligarchical. The internal environment of an organization also pushes it towards oligarchy. The personal motives of "managers"

(e.g., promotion and job security) cause them to be faithful to the bureaucracy instead of its social change goals (Michels, 1949).

Few have disputed Michels' observation that organizations tend to become more bureaucratic. It is generally accepted that a primary goal of all organizations is to survive. However, other studies of organizations indicate that this concern for survival does not always result in the organization becoming conservative and oligarchical (Blau and Meyer, 1956; Zald and Ash, 1966; Sills, 1969; Ash, 1972; Oberschall, 1973).

William Gamson, in his study of 53 social movement organizations, found that all of the organizations became more bureaucratic but he did not find this to be incompatible with the organization's social change goals. The more bureaucratic attributes an organization had, the more likely it was to be successful. The bureaucratic structure provided a unity of command and a means for handling internal conflicts. It kept the organization ready to take advantage of opportunities when they came along. The well established organizations were more able to take advantage of opportunities provided by a crisis than were newly established organizations (Gamson, 1975).

Jo Freeman's analysis of women's movement organizations supports the thesis regarding the benefits of bureaucratic attributes. However, she contends that different organizational structures mold strategic possibilities. The effectiveness of an organization's structure depends on its target for change. The organization may create a structure that is effective for a particular target but when the organization moves on to another target, its structure may no longer be effective. It is difficult and time consuming to change a structure and make it more compatible with a new target (Freeman, 1979).

These theories lead to an analysis of the NUL's bureaucratic attributes and their effect on the organization's ability to remain viable during a period of severe economic depression and rapid social change. By 1930, the NUL was a well established bureaucracy. Its bureaucratic attributes included

a constitution, by-laws, departments that specialized in certain aspects of its work (e.g., industrial relations, research, publications), an organizational hierarchy, and terms of affiliation. The constitution gave the Executive Board the power to make policy and appropriate funds but there appears to have been a collegial climate within the organization with the staff very involved in formulating policy (NUL Constitution, 1930–36; NUL Executive Board Meetings, 1933–39).

The organization was a confederation with 42 affiliates, mostly in the Northeast and Midwest, and a national office in New York (NUL Papers, 1930b; NUL, 1980). Eugene Kinckle Jones served as the Executive Secretary of the NUL and T. Arnold Hill, Secretary of the Industrial Relations Department, was the main liaison between the national office and the affiliates. There was a dependency between the national office and the affiliates that encouraged cooperation and cohesiveness. The national office needed the affiliates to carry out its various programs and to support its efforts to change national policy. The affiliates benefited from the prestige of the NUL and the information and guidance the national office provided. This mutual dependency was an incentive for the national office and the affiliates to avoid activities that might cause conflict between them. Yet there was tension between the two because the affiliates did not always help to carry out national programs; perhaps because some of these programs were considered too controversial in respective affiliate cities. The affiliates were totally dependent on local contributors so many avoided controversy because they feared this might impede fund raising and limit local support of their programs.

The Terms of Affiliation set standards for the establishment of affiliates and for some aspects of their operation (Terms of Affiliation, 1925–32, 1935, 1939). Shortly after its founding, the NUL sought to expand by affiliating with existing local organizations with goals similar to the League's. Many of these organizations feared that their affiliation with the NUL would encroach on their autonomy. The NUL found that it had to allow these organizations a

great deal of autonomy if it was to expand and become a national organization (Weiss, 1974). This created a loose confederation that caused problems for the League in its efforts to respond quickly to New Deal legislation and it tried to overcome this. Its involvement with the National Recovery Administration (NRA) illustrates its efforts to do so.

One of the first acts of the New Deal administration created the NRA in 1933. Its purpose was to stimulate private industry to produce more and thus enable it to hire more workers. The act was also to regulate workers' hours and wages through the establishment of fair practice codes (Leuchtenberg, 1963). One of the NUL's major concerns, in regard to the NRA, was the exclusion of agriculture and domestic workers from code coverage, thus excluding two-thirds of the black work force. This meant that most black workers had no protection against exploitation by employers (NUL, 1933).

The NUL responded to the creation of the NRA by announcing a new program at its regional conferences in 1933. T. Arnold Hill, Secretary of the Industrial Relations Department, explained that "It might be necessary to recast and reshape the programs of the League in light of new social changes" (NUL Papers, 1933a). Consequently, an Emergency Advisory Council (EAC) would be established, made up of prominent blacks (business men and women, educators, ministers, and other professionals) around the country. The EAC would address NRA issues and educate black workers about the various recovery programs, including how to apply for benefits and programs. Local EACs, which the affiliates were asked to establish, would be coordinated by the national EAC. The program would have an "unofficial relationship" with the NUL (NUL Papers, 1933b). This parallel structure (EAC) allowed the national office to create and control a program at a local level, circumventing some of the resistance the affiliates might have had to the program. This was a significant departure from the League's reliance on the affiliates for implementing programs. There was also a radical deviation from the NUL's traditional policy. Membership in the EACs was limited to blacks. When this policy was

questioned at one of the regional conferences, Hill responded, "The advantages of this form of organization is (sic) that they (blacks) are able better to express in unmistakable terms just what the Negroes want" (NUL Papers, 1933b).

The structure created by the national office worked well. Most of the affiliates became involved along with prominent blacks throughout the country. By the end of 1933, 196 EACs had been organized in 32 states and the District of Columbia (NUL Papers, 1933c). (The NUL had affiliates in only 19 states so this program helped the organization to expand (NUL Papers 1930,b). The EACs enabled the NUL to collect many incidents of code violations and incidents of discrimination in New Deal work and work-relief programs. This information was passed on to New Deal officials. The EACs also helped blacks gain a better understanding of New Deal programs, especially eligibility criteria (NUL Papers, 1933d,e). However, two-thirds of the black work force remained uncovered by the NRA codes.

In 1934 the NUL established even more control over the EACs by developing a formal plan of organization that gave the national EAC (essentially the national office) the power to approve all members and the right to remove any members who did not follow EAC policy (NUL Papers, 1934a). This formal plan was probably developed to protect the image of the NUL as well as establish more control. Although the EAC had an "unofficial relationship" with the NUL, the League was visibly involved. It tended to be a cautious organization and did not want the EACs to be "in any way political" or radical (NUL Papers, 1934a).

The activities of the EACs began to decline when the NRA was declared unconstitutional in 1935. This eliminated the reason for them in the minds of many (NUL Papers, 1935a). The NUL considered making the EACs a permanent part of its structure because "a good deal of work (could) be done by making permanent those that do exist, and reviewing some of those that have lost interest." It was decided that "a shortage of staff" made it "inadvisable to list this as a major activity for the coming year" (NUL Papers, 1938a).

The NUL's concern about the substantial gains that organized labor was making as a result of New Deal legislation was the catalyst for creating a structure, like the EAC, for a new labor program. It provides another example of the organization's efforts to make its structure more compatible with its target for change. Organized labor had control of a large proportion of jobs in the public and private sectors yet many unions refused to admit black workers. The NUL feared that blacks would be permanently shut out of jobs and thought that the discriminatory policies of organized labor needed to be addressed in some way. It considered using the EACs for this but decided that a program with a narrower focus would be more effective (NUL Papers, 1934b).

It created a Workers' Bureau that, like the EAC, circumvented the autonomy of the affiliates. The Workers' Bureau established black Workers' Councils and coordinated their activities. The NUL had difficulty raising money for the labor program from its usual sources (white philanthropists and philanthropic foundations) so it turned its attention to the black middle class. It formed an all-black committee, the Committee of 100, to campaign for middle class blacks to support a movement aimed at black workers (NUL Papers, 1934b). Getting support for this program among blacks was not an easy task. Many blacks were anti-union because of bitter experiences with unions in the past. The NUL's labor program was criticized by the black press, the black church, and black fraternal organizations. It was also criticized by more militant blacks as being too mild and "muddling the issues" (Cayton and Mitchell, 1939). The League was able to overcome some of this criticism because the chair of the Committee of 100 was the publisher of *The Chicago Defender* and an NUL board member was the editor of *The Pittsburgh Courier*, two black newspapers with national circulations. These papers provided at least a forum to present the pro-union argument to the black community (Parris and Brooks).

The Committee of 100 was able to raise enough money (\$2000) to launch the labor program but not enough to sustain it for any length of time. The program was more controversial than the EAC and fewer affiliates participated.

Lester Granger, Secretary of the Workers' Bureau, traveled around the country speaking to groups about the League's labor program and organizing Workers' Councils. He also alienated some affiliates when he organized in cities where they were opposed to the program. By 1935 there were 42 Workers' Councils in 17 states and 73 by 1937 (NUL Papers, 1935b, 1937a; Hamilton, 1984; Granger Oral History, 1960–61).

The Councils pressured organized labor to prohibit discrimination in unions; they helped black workers to understand the advantages of belonging to unions; they informed New Deal officials of incidents of discrimination in New Deal programs; and they campaigned for an anti-discriminatory clause in all government contracts that would prohibit the participation of unions that were discriminatory (Hamilton; NUL Papers, 1934c, d, 1935c, d).

The labor program was of short duration due to the NUL's financial problems, but in some areas the councils were instrumental in getting black workers admitted to unions. Supervision of the Workers' Councils by the national office required fairly frequent contacts between the Councils and the Workers' Bureau and the League did not have the staff or money to sustain this program for a long period of time. By mid-1937 the activities of the Councils were on the decline. The Committee of 100 was practically inactive (Hamilton; NUL Papers 1937a). Conflicts had developed between the Workers' Bureau and some of the affiliates opposed to the labor program (NUL Papers, 1938b). Radical groups infiltrated some of the Councils and the NUL closed these down. There were conflicts within some of the Councils indicating that the craft versus industrial union conflict had spilled over into them (NUL Papers, 1936a, 1937b, c, 1938c; Cayton and Mitchell, 1939). Granger took a leave of absence (NUL Papers, 1938d). All of these events contributed to the demise of the labor program. By the end of 1937 only 25 councils remained active. The NUL thought the labor program could be revived with extensive field work but this was never done—in all likelihood because the

resources to do so were not available (NUL Papers, 1937d, 1939a, b, 1940a).

The more centralized, temporary structures created by the NUL appear to have been a viable way for the organization to overcome the limitations its decentralized structure placed on its ability to respond quickly to New Deal legislation, but it was too costly. Its efforts to develop new national programs and to change on-going programs without this kind of structure were rather futile. The following activities of the NUL illustrate this point.

The League continued to be concerned with helping black workers become involved with organized labor and at the 1937 Annual Conference proposed a national program to organize black domestic workers into a union. This would put them in a more advantageous position to bargain for better wages and working conditions. There were affiliates for and affiliates against this proposal. Those against it argued that the League had no control over outside employment agencies and therefore setting up standards of work was outside of its realm of capabilities. Furthermore, such activity might interfere with its financial base because employers, local funding boards, and foundations would be against it. Those in favor of the proposal argued that it was part of the NUL's job; it had a binding obligation to help poor black women. These proponents believed that such a program was likely to improve chances for funding. "Collective action" was "an advanced program approved by liberal thought that generally characterize(d) League supporters" (NUL Papers, 1937e). It was a field where blacks could lead and reap the benefits. Failure to assume this leadership would cause the NUL to lag behind progressive public opinion and lose its dominant position (NUL Papers, 1937e).

Many of the affiliates had been inundated with black women seeking employment throughout the Depression and domestic work was likely to be the only work the Leagues had to offer them. As a result, many of the affiliates had been involved with black domestic workers and concerned about their plight. These women worked long hours for very



low wages. Nonetheless, the NUL was not able to get the financial and affiliate support needed to launch a national program directed at black domestic workers. Some of the Leagues continued their efforts to improve conditions for them but the autonomy of the affiliates as well as the NUL's financial situation mitigated against the proposed national program (NUL Papers 1933f, 1934e, 1939d, 1940b).

Late in the Depression, the NUL weighed the advantages of continuing with its Employment Bureau. This had been a major program in its Industrial Relations Department since the department was established in 1925 (Parris and Brooks, 1971). It had been conceived as a means for helping black workers obtain better jobs, to find employment for blacks in areas where they had been excluded because of race. During the Depression the employment service had become mostly a service to help black workers obtain relief. Since the League had few jobs to offer at that time (those few it did have tended to be at the lowest end of the occupational ladder and paid very low wages), most who sought employment at League offices became certified as unemployed and seeking work, thus making them eligible for relief (NUL Papers, 1939e, f). This service clearly went against a goal of the organization—the expansion of job opportunities for black workers. The NUL firmly believed that it was important for blacks to be gainfully employed. It did not want to facilitate the creation of a large black population dependent on “the dole” (Hamilton, 1984). The NUL thought its resources might be put to better use. Furthermore, the federal government was helping the states set up employment offices, perhaps making the League's services redundant (NUL Papers, 1940c).

The affiliates were surveyed on this matter in 1939. While some of the affiliates considered their employment services essential and helpful, others thought that the service thwarted efforts to remove racial barriers and expand job opportunities. Those who thought the employment service was essential argued that the special needs of black workers made it necessary to have a service tailored to meet these

needs. Those who questioned the usefulness of the service thought it did not warrant the amount of resources needed to provide it. Opinions among the affiliates seem to have been dependent on local conditions and customs. Some states used discriminatory practices that did not "lend a sense of dignity to Negro labor." (NUL Papers, 1939g). Separate seating arrangements in employment offices and the classification of occupations by race made black applicants feel that they were not being given equal access to jobs. In some cities there were separate offices for blacks and whites and referrals were made to the "black office" only when the job order could not be filled with white applicants. Some states had integrated services with few or no black staff members and some states had offices that were integrated with a number of black employees (NUL Papers, 1938d, 1939h, i).

The majority of the affiliates chose to continue their employment services. Some may have done so because they believed that the League's services provided an essential black perspective that could not be provided by the government office. Others may have continued with the service because they feared losing a major program and consequently a great deal of financial support. At any rate, the employment service continued to be a prominent part of the NUL program. Few affiliates were willing to redirect their resources. The autonomy of the affiliates prevented a change in the direction of programs.

The affiliates' autonomy seems helpful in the sense that it allowed them to make decisions about programs based on their perception of local needs. For example, it appears that there were some cities where black workers would benefit from the continuation of the League employment service. The structure was not helpful to the extent that it limited the League's ability to respond quickly and to control resources. However, making a permanent change in the structure of the organization proved to be very difficult as evidenced by the following account of the NUL's attempt to gain more control over the affiliates.

At the latter part of the Depression it proposed an amendment to the Terms of Affiliation that would give the Executive Board the power to confirm the affiliates' staff appointments and review the work of an affiliate employee "who, in the judgement of the NUL, is not performing his duties satisfactorily and in accordance with the standards and practices of the NUL" (NUL Papers, 1938c). This was clearly a move on the part of the national office to standardize affiliate activities.

This attempt to amend the Terms of Affiliation created much dissension between the national office and the affiliates, and it was not until 1940 that the Terms were amended. The Executive Board did not get the power to confirm affiliate staff appointments but it did get the power to "review the work of any affiliate employee. . ." (NUL Papers, 1940d). This amendment extended the power of the national office over the affiliates to some extent. The decentralized structure remained and the national office and the affiliates each continued to try to gain more power within the organization.

As the national office tried to amend the Terms of Affiliation, the affiliates formed the Executive Secretaries' Council to air some of their grievances with the national office and to push for more involvement in the NUL's decision making process. The Secretaries' Council was concerned about the infrequent contacts between the national office and the affiliates. This lack of contact fostered "fear, suspicion, and a lack of faith in the national office" (NUL Papers, 1939j). It was unhappy with staff changes, especially since the affiliates had not been officially informed of these changes but had heard rumors about them (NUL Papers, 1939j).

These criticisms occurred at a time when the NUL was in dire financial straits and as a result, had sharply curtailed its contacts with the affiliates (NUL Papers, 1939k, 1940e). To make matters worse, T. Arnold Hill, the main liaison between the national office and the affiliates for about 25 years, was dividing his time between the NUL and the Department of Labor in Washington. In addition, the Executive

Secretary, Eugene Kinkle Jones, was ill and had less energy to devote to the administration of the organization (NUL Papers, 1940f).

The national office's response to the Secretaries' Council did not ease the latter's concern and it asked for representation at the quarterly board meetings (NUL Papers, 1940g). The Steering Committee, acting on behalf of the Executive Committee, denied this request by choosing not to recognize the Secretaries' Council "as part and parcel of the NUL's constitutional set-up." It was not "an organic part of the structure" and therefore the NUL could not "grant the right of the Executive Secretaries' Council to be formally represented at each . . . quarterly meeting. . . . (NUL Papers, 1940g, h). The bureaucracy prevailed; a bureaucratic attribute of the NUL, its constitution, was used to circumvent the secretaries' attempt to gain more power within the organization. This incident shows how difficult it is for an organization to make a permanent change in its structure and how bureaucratic attributes can help to control internal conflicts.

The tension between the national office and the affiliates seems to have some positive aspects. It served as a balance of power and prevented either from gaining complete control of the organization. This slowed the tendency toward oligarchy and fostered a dialogue. However, the NUL would have been a much stronger national organization if all of its affiliates had been involved in its national programs. This would have given NUL leaders much more leverage with New Deal decision makers when they pressured them for certain policies.

### The Dual Function

Mayer Zald and Roberta Ash believe that the main problem for social movement organizations is maintaining a base of support. These organizations have goals that are not quickly or easily accomplished so the enthusiasm of members may wane. It is easier to hold the participation and commitment of members, they contend, if the goals of the

organization are directed toward changing individual behavior rather than changing society (1966). Judith Trolander, in her study of community funding boards during the Depression, found that these boards tended to be composed of the more conservative elements in the community and preferred giving to organizations that did not challenge the status quo (Trolander, 1973).

Freeman's study of women's movement organizations points out the benefits of the dual function in that movement—consciousness-raising (changing individuals) and lobbying (changing societal institutions). Consciousness-raising was a main activity of the newer branches and attracted many new members. In the meantime, the older branch was able to continue its pressure on legislators with a stronger support base (Freeman, 1979).

The NUL had been, since its founding, a dual function organization that provided services aimed at changing individual behavior, e.g., helping black workers develop skills and "good" work habits, and pressured for societal changes, e.g., pressuring for the prohibition of discriminatory employment policies. However, the affiliates were very dependent on their local funding organizations. Fear of losing financial support is a logical explanation for the affiliates' lack of cooperation with the national office. Many of the affiliates that engaged in social action had difficulties with community funding boards (NUL Papers, 1933g,h, 1935e, 1936b, 1937f, 1939l). This caused some affiliates to avoid controversial issues and activities. For example, some of the affiliates promoted employment services that stressed their efforts to develop characteristics of "loyalty, honesty, and industry" in black workers as "safeguards against loss" (NUL Papers, 1939m). This probably seemed safer to them than engaging in social action to fight discriminatory policies. When an affiliate did run into difficulties, the national office, at the request of the affiliate, tried to help. The NUL recognized the difficulties inherent in the affiliates' relationships with their major sources of funding. For example, when considering the labor program, the NUL stated, "It might be necessary

in view of the stand on labor problems for the Leagues to divest themselves of the support of Community Funds and white patronage" (NUL Papers, 1935f).

The experience of the Executive Secretary of the Kansas City, Missouri League is a good example of the problems the affiliates encountered with their funding boards. The Kansas City League was one of the Leagues that had cooperated with the national office in the implementation of the labor program and the Executive Secretary of that League had had on-going difficulties with other groups in the city. When he was on the verge of losing the support of his funding organization, the Council of Social Agencies, he wrote to Hill for help. He told Hill the League's "techniques did not fit in with community mores" (NUL Papers, 1939l). An evaluation by the Council of Social Agencies was devastating. It accused the secretary of political involvement and said he lacked community organization skills. It demanded that he resign along with the entire board, with the exception of the recently elected president. A new board would be appointed by the Council and the League president. The report described the two functions of the League as incompatible. It was not possible for the UL to be a "coordinating community organization agency" and an agency functioning "as an articulation and expression of a minority group's struggle for economic opportunity and increased social equality" (NUL Papers, 1939n). The Kansas City League was accused of stimulating action of other groups, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Negro Congress. Some whites thought "outside agitators" were involved. The immediate source of contention seems to have been a suit filed by the secretary to allow blacks to play golf on the municipal course. This was regarded as advocating for social equality for blacks (NUL Papers, 1939o).

Hill went to Kansas City to help resolve the problem and was able to delay the Council's threat to cut off the League's funds and to bring the parties together to discuss their differences. Hill's report of his visit concluded that it was indeed difficult for a League to "be a coordinating agency

which required the cooperation and confidence of all agencies in the city" and at the same time help black people make social and economic advancement. When "the League attempted to do the latter . . . it would alienate forces that would help it do the former" (NUL Papers, 1939p). He thought it was possible to do both but this "in large measure depended upon the tact of the Executive Secretary and the support the Board gave him" (NUL Papers, 1939p). The experiences of the Kansas City secretary emphasize the uneasy truce that existed between blacks and whites in some urban areas and the difficulties caused by the affiliates' dependency on local funding boards.

It seems feasible that the dual function of the organization helped it to survive. The League was able to emphasize its efforts to change individual behavior and thus not alienate its sources of funding. At the same time, it could engage in activities aimed at institutional change as long as these activities did not attract too much attention and were not too controversial. For example, the NUL's lack of publicity regarding its activities related to the NRA was questioned by an affiliate secretary. Eugene K. Jones responded that "it was often unwise to publicize the type of activities that have been carried on by the League in Washington recently" (NUL Papers, 1933a). It was explained that "the very nature of the work done by the National, certain accomplishments could never be reported as resulting from Urban League work, and over-emphasizing this phase of activity could be more detrimental than beneficial" (NUL Papers, 1933b).

Although the organization was cautious and preferred not to call attention to its efforts directed at institutional change, it was willing to take risks on some issues about which it felt strongly. In addition to creating a labor program that was initially unpopular among its black constituents and many of its white supporters, it testified in favor of a controversial social security bill, H.R. 2827 (Hill, 1935; NUL, 1935). This bill was regarded as a communist proposal to get the support of the workers (the Lundeen or

Workers' Bill). The bill emphasized that unemployment was "a disease of the capitalist system" and therefore the beneficiaries of that system should compensate the victims (Mitchell, 1947). According to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "the Unemployed Councils controlled by the Communist party persuaded Ernest Lundeen, a left-wing Farmer-Labor congressman from Minnesota to introduce the bill. . ." (1959).

It is not possible to know exactly why the NUL risked testifying in favor of this bill but perhaps it did so because the bill embodied policies that the League strongly favored. Social security would cover all workers, it would be administered by the federal government, and it would be entirely funded by employers. Those most in need were to be given priority for benefits (Hill, 1935). The organization's realization of the importance of this bill for black workers seems to have superceded its concerns about protecting its image. The dual function of the organization may have helped it to survive this testimony.

## Conclusion

The NUL's bureaucratic attributes, for the most part, enhanced the organization's ability to adapt to changes in its external environment and these attributes increased during the Depression. The League created temporary structures that were more centralized and therefore enabled it to exercise greater control over local programs. However one attribute, its decentralized structure, limited the NUL's adaptive capacities. It did not lend itself well to national programs and efforts to change New Deal policies. The NUL tried to change this structure by amending the Terms of Affiliation but this proved to be very difficult. Although the League's bureaucracy controlled internal conflict, the decentralized structure remained.

Its efforts to gain more control over the affiliates show some tendency toward oligarchy but the organization did not become more conservative. It wanted control of the affiliates so that it could implement programs that many of the affiliates regarded as too controversial for their respective



communities. In addition, it deviated from its usual interracial policy by creating all-black groups. It also testified in favor of a radical social security bill.

The dual function of the organization, changing individual behavior and changing societal conditions, seems directly related to its ability to survive the Depression. In all likelihood, this was not a conscious strategy developed by the organization. Shirley Jenkins' study of modern day ethnic organizations indicates that these organizations tend to be multi-service organizations because their clients are poor and in need of help in many areas (Jenkins, 1980, 1981). This appears to be the case for the NUL. It tried to meet the various needs of its constituents in different ways. However, it was able to emphasize one aspect of its work over another when it appeared that this would help the organization hold on to its supporters. Thus the dual function helped the organization avoid becoming more conservative. It remained a fairly flexible, pragmatic organization, important adaptive qualities.

This study has focused on two internal characteristics of the NUL and consequently, does not include many important dynamics. It is not the intent of this article to assume that the NUL's difficulties were entirely related to these internal qualities of the organization. They appear to have had some effect on the organization, limiting and enhancing its effectiveness; but a major reason the NUL proceeded cautiously seems related to its position in society. It represented a minority constituency that lacked status, political power, and financial resources. This limited its access to resources and decision makers and made it a very vulnerable organization.

The NUL was a well established organization at the onset of the Depression and was able to help many black workers take advantage of New Deal programs. However, it was not able to bring about any significant change in the plight of black Americans, particularly legislation to prohibit discrimination by organized labor and employers. Some blacks gained employment through union membership,

others through the new civil service system; but too large a proportion of black workers were unemployed and on welfare as New Deal work and work-relief programs ended. Two-thirds of the black work force, domestic and agriculture workers, were excluded from coverage under the Social Security Act (Wood, 1939). Perhaps a reason for the conflict within the organization at the latter part of the Depression was related to the disappointment that staff and board members felt when they realized that not as much had been accomplished as they had hoped. The organization turned inward. The national office tried to make the organization's structure more centralized by amending the Terms of Affiliation and the affiliates tried to make the structure more decentralized with the formation of the Executive Secretaries' Council. Less time was devoted to social change issues and more time to the maintenance of the organization. During this critical period, the bureaucracy controlled internal conflict and the NUL survived to continue its struggle to help black Americans make economic and social advancement.

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FROM COUNTRYWOMAN TO FEDERAL  
EMERGENCY RELIEF ADMINISTRATOR:  
JOSEPHINE CHAPIN BROWN,  
A BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY

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*This study documents the life and career of Josephine Chapin Brown, an early leader in public welfare and rural social work. Historical research showed that Brown's ideas on social work and on professional training for social work were often against the paradigm of her time. For example, Brown was a committed ruralite when social work was primarily urban; Brown supported social work training for public welfare workers in the agricultural colleges (many now state universities) when social work was committed to a more elitist training model. As a result she was ostracized by many of her influential contemporaries. Her orientation towards building coalitions with rural sociologists made her even less popular among her social work colleagues. In spite of Brown's many contributions to rural social work and public welfare, her life and works have remained undocumented by social work biographers. Because the battles she fought and lost are still current, a review of Brown's life history might not only be of historical interest but also enlighten contemporary debates.*

## Introduction

The life and work of Josephine Chapin Brown, born in Ogdensburg, New York, on October 20, 1887, has remained



undocumented in spite of her pioneering contributions to the fields of public welfare and rural social work.<sup>1</sup> Although Brown was a farmer, a researcher, a family welfare worker, a public figure and a fairly prolific author, one possible explanation for her relative obscurity in social work history lies in her own reserved personality. Yet, further examination of her life and career leads us to another hypothesis. Brown's ideas about levels of training for social workers were unorthodox and against the paradigm of her time. The record shows that powerful social work leaders, having disagreed with Brown on her training proposals and on her *modus operandi* during her tenure at the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), remained antagonistic toward her when the "relief crisis" was over. Yet, many of Brown's most controversial ideas such as the training of social workers for public welfare in the agricultural (state) colleges of the nation became a reality decades later with the advent of undergraduate social work education.

While the main objective of this manuscript is biographical, the politics of social work and social work training in the early days of the profession come clearly to the fore by following the wax and wane of Brown's professional career. History casts Brown as having entered a number of sensitive debates in the course of her career, often suffering personally for the political losses of certain themes. She was a ruralite at a time of ferment in that field; she was a generalist when specialization began to make its mark in social work and she continued to support a "democratized" model of training when the profession, having survived the Depression, became more elitist. Social work and social work education continue to be indicted even today for their abandonment of public welfare as a central concern. Brown's life work was devoted to creating a cadre of well trained rural and public welfare workers within the fiscal and political constraints of those two fields. Although she personally lost many of her battles, the issues are still pertinent and unresolved today. Her life story might provide some insights.

## Youth and College Years

The daughter of Silas Edgar Brown (or Browne), a surgeon, and of Mary Chapin Bacon, Josephine Chapin Brown, received her early schooling at the Ogdensburg Free Academy and the Balliol School in Utica, New York. She attended Bryn Mawr College from 1906 to 1908 and then again from 1911 to 1913, graduating with an A.B. in Physics and Biology. Brown's course of study included Chemistry, Philosophy and Psychology, Latin, Greek and German (Bryn Mawr College Archives, 1920).

During her college years, Brown's family moved to St. Paul, Minnesota. In 1908, Brown was forced to leave Bryn Mawr for two years due to financial difficulties (Bryn Mawr College Archives, 1914) during which time she taught Latin and Mathematics at the Oak Hall School for Girls in St. Paul, Minnesota. In June 1911, Brown was awarded the Thomas H. Powers Memorial scholarship enabling her to return for another year of studies at Bryn Mawr. In 1912, Bryn Mawr President M. Carey Thomas wrote to Brown letting her know that the college had received a scholarship gift "with the request that this scholarship be awarded to you as a token of admiration for your ability and character" (Bryn Mawr College Archives, 1912). At Bryn Mawr, Brown was considered an excellent student; she was older than most of the members of her graduating class and was held in high esteem by teachers and peers alike.

Bryn Mawr College enrollment records indicate that Brown was a Presbyterian. Her religious nature, highlighted in later years by her conversion to Catholicism, seemed apparent from an early point in her life. Soon after her graduation from Bryn Mawr, during 1913 and 1914, she worked as a Pastor's assistant at the House of Hope Church in St. Paul. To the biographer, Brown emerges as an upper-middle class woman who with great determination sought to confront her family's reverses of fortune and was successful in her quest.

In 1914, probably at the recommendation of the Dean of the College at Bryn Mawr, Brown secured a position as teacher of Greek and Social Problems at the Misses Shipley's

School in Bryn Mawr, a prestigious private academy. She did not, however, remain there for long. Brown manifested the restlessness and intolerance of monotonous routine characteristic of the early social reformers. In fact, in 1916, she wrote for her Bryn Mawr Class Bulletin: "I didn't write for the bulletin last year—probably because there wasn't anything interesting to write about teaching at a boarding school. Too many other people were doing the same thing." "Now," she stated in her 1916 letter, "I have something to write about" (Bryn Mawr College Archives, 1916).

By 1915, Brown had returned to Minnesota and begun work as a "substitute officer and teacher" at the Home School for Girls in Sauk Center, an institution for delinquent girls (Minnesota State Archives Collection, 1915–1916). Sauk Center was Brown's introduction not only to the helping field but to the rural environment that she would devotedly study and serve later in her life. Of that experience she wrote:

Since August, I've been working for the State of Minnesota in the Home School for Girls. There are eight 'cottages' holding about two hundred girls between the ages of 8 and 18. They are sent here by the Juvenile Courts of the State for various offenses—and we are trying to send them out fitted to support themselves. Girl after girl has gone out to build or at least settle a home of her own . . . Because the school is in the country, there is a huge farm where the girls work in the spring and summer. Part of my job is to take them to the field, and I expect to spend many hours this spring grubbing in the earth and keeping them out of mischief at the same time (Bryn Mawr College Archives, 1916).

### The Countrywoman

The rural revitalization that followed the work of Theodore Roosevelt's 1908 Country Life Commission spurred a back-to-the-land movement. The Commission had inspired a "country-life" campaign in the hope of returning the best leadership to the country (Swanson, 1972). At the end of 1913, Kenyon L. Butterfield, a renowned Massachusetts agriculturalist and member of the Commission wrote in the *Survey*: "The forces of the countryside are gathering for a

great forward looking movement. What shall the New Year bring us in our country-life campaign" (Butterfield, 1913:252). Apparently, Brown was caught in the fervor of this country-life campaign, the beginning of her evolving interest in the country. The year 1916 found her preparing for a farming venture.

Before embarking upon a project on an Idaho farm, Brown took the "Short Agricultural Course" at the University of Wisconsin. This was a course offered by Agricultural Extension, a service with which she would also show significant familiarity in later years. About this period she humorously wrote:

The last year has been varied. An ambition to raise chickens put an end to my career at the Girls' Training School . . . It was a question not of loving my work at the School less—but of loving (?) chickens more! It was a hot summer in St. Paul, interrupted by a hotter three weeks at Madison, Wisconsin, where I tore from hens to cows and sometimes pigs—trying to prepare a little for a venture in farming. The Agricultural Short Course was most interesting. . . .

On the first of October we started for Idaho—our worldly goods accompanying us on a freight car. My partner in this wild undertaking—is—for we are still going on—a Wellesley girl who lives in St. Paul—and who shares my longing for a cow, a few chickens and a garden. I somehow feel like Robinson Crusoe writing about it, for though we were not cast upon an island, it certainly was a desert. We were grateful for three ranges of mountains—but we longed for trees while we grubbed in the sage brush for firewood—climbed fences, pitched hay, milked our two cows, fed the chickens and the pigs and harvested the corn . . . We were eight miles out on forty acres—all irrigated land in the Boise Valley. We lived alone most of three months in the little cottage on the place—with a Winchester 22 leaning against the chimney in the living room. Not even a coyote nor a rabbit was the worse for that rifle . . . They must have smelled it!" (Bryn Mawr College Archives, 1917).

Brown's farming efforts in Idaho came to an end soon. In spite of their dedication, the two young "back-to-the-landers" found the Idaho environment hard to manage. Yet,

Brown learned to regard highly and appreciate the strengths and generosity of farm families. Her feelings are revealed in her comments about the unsuccessful Idaho venture:

The country was full of charming people—and the air was wonderful—but we could not have the air and neighbors—and the ranch was too big for us to handle alone. We wanted something we could do ourselves—something smaller just for chickens and a cow. So at Christmas time we sold out what we could—packed the rest and came back to St. Paul, leaving the irrigation ditches which we had not purchased—to their fate. If any one is tempted to pity us on a lovely Christmas day—don't do it! We dined with the best of neighbors—whose names deserve to go down for posterity for their kindness to the 'boys who lived on that ranch.' The best is to come. These neighbors had nine children all the way from two to nineteen years old.! (Bryn Mawr College Archives, 1917).

Those early farm experiences were to serve Brown well. As a member of various social service organizations years later, and particularly at the Family Welfare Association (now Family Service Association of America, FSAA), she was often to call upon her experiences on the farm and with country families. Her expertise transcended the theoretical. She had, in fact, tried for quite a few years to make a living on the farm and knew first hand the demands and problems of the rural environment.

The onset of 1917 found Brown and her homesteading companion looking "for a farm near St. Paul" where they intended to make their "chicken business pay" (Bryn Mawr College Archives, 1917). Finally, they settled on a dairy farm in Marine, Minnesota, where they farmed until the year 1920. Years later, Brown would rely on her farming experiences in Marine to lend credence to her testimony when, as a social worker, she was asked to talk about rural needs. In 1930, for example, while staffing a project on rural social work research for the Social Science Research Council, Brown was invited to attend a meeting of the National Social Work Council where the "Social Needs of Village and Farm People" were being discussed. At that meeting, Brown said:

My only claim to being heard at this time in talking about rural social needs is the fact that I feel I come before this group not as a social worker but as an ex-farmer. For several years . . . I was a hard working partner on a very small dairy farm in Minnesota, and having gone from that dairy farm to do case work in a very rural county, I learned to appreciate fully the value of my experience on that farm in learning what it meant, or some of the things it meant, to live in the country and do work in the country.

For four years I milked cows twice a day, dug out straw stacks and carted hay and cleaned out barns, ran a separator and did house work, took care of chickens and pigs and ran a garden. There were just two of us working on this place and we did all the work inside and out of the house . . . I think of social workers, people who go to talk to rural people as to what they might to do improve the conditions under which they live, talk to them about their children who have perhaps gotten into difficulties or who aren't doing well in school, and I think the social workers who have only knowledge of city life who go to these people and talk to them in such terms, go to farmers wives who are working as we did from early morning until late at night, exhausting physical labor, I just wonder if their reaction isn't more than ours was one of aggravation that somebody who knows so little of what you are really up against when you live on a farm in the country should come in and try to talk how you can remedy some of your social needs (National Social Work Council, 1930:33-34).

Brown, the countrywoman, had little patience with social workers who spoke only theoretically about rural needs and issues.

### Life as a Local Rural Worker

Whether the chicken business paid or didn't could not be clearly ascertained. In 1920, Brown took a position with the United Charities of St. Paul (now Family Service of St. Paul) as Visitor and District Secretary for South St. Paul. The United Charities was at that time engaged in providing relief to the poor, a function it continued until 1933. Whether Brown's responsibilities were solely urban or whether she

did rural visits could not be ascertained. Her district, however, must have been close to the farm where she had lived, an area of Washington County on the St. Croix River<sup>2</sup> between Minnesota and Wisconsin, for while working for the United Charities, she speaks of going back to the tiny little village of Marine, near her former farm, to experience the neighborliness of the folk.

Between 1921 and 1923, Brown served as Executive Secretary of the Dakota County Welfare Association still in Minnesota. At that time, the total population of Dakota County, located directly south of St. Paul was 29,000 people, with only two cities "so small that they would have been considered villages in the East" (Brown, 1922b:667). It was during those years in Dakota County that Brown began to forge her own thoughts about rural service delivery. Brown was convinced that rural helping was based on personal knowledge and understanding of the people involved; she always stressed that she had validated her rural theories by assessing them in light of the comments of her former neighbors and the recipients of her services.

During the 1920's and 1930's, when the enforcement of child labor laws for farm children was a major task of social workers, Brown, unlike other social workers, appreciated the circumstances that made farmers feel that all children should work and advised her colleagues on how to best approach the problem. During the same period, when the Country Life Movement was stressing farmers' participation in community activities as a way of promoting the welfare and improvement of farm people, Brown often advocated for country people, arguing that in spite of "social vision and consciousness", physical exhaustion and not lack of ambition curtailed the community involvement of the farmer and his wife (National Social Work Council, 1930:36). Above all, when city trained caseworkers stressed the merits of professionalized or formalized relationships, Brown provided a realistic perspective by highlighting the major components of a rural social worker: the ability to talk to rural folk in their own terms, to understand their unique conditions, to share with them their plights as a neighbor would, without

imposing on them external or highly intrusive solutions.

You can't walk into a farmer's barnyard when he is working hard and just say right out to him, 'Now your children ought not to work so hard. Let them join this club and get some fun out of life.' You have got to know that man. He has got to know you. If you can go in there and get acquainted with him, if he knows you belong in that community for a long time, that maybe you have done some of the things he is doing, if you can look over his herd of cows and discuss with him their merits and demerits, the ones that are good milkers, if you can talk intelligently about his crops . . . if you can help him realize that you know the situation he is in . . . you stand a much better chance of persuading him to listen to you . . . (National Social Work Council, 1930:37-38).

Brown's advice, it should be noted, is still highly valid. Rural social work experts continue to emphasize the need to know the rural context, that is the many aspects of the rural milieu that affect service delivery. While current notions of rurality include more than agricultural areas and encompass, in fact, all non-metropolitan environments, it is still important for workers to possess the same general understanding of the rural environment and of the activities of rural people that Brown discussed in her days. The key to good rural practice continues to be the capacity of workers to establish and maintain open dialogues with rural clients.

If it is a good thing for the City case worker to know her own community, I find it is essential for the rural workers. It is one of the steps she must take to become a part of her community. In a large city, she may go about from office to clients and back to her office without knowing much about or taking any particular part in the political, social or religious life of the city in which she is working; and this inactivity may not materially hinder the effectiveness of the work. In the country—quite the contrary is true. From county officials to clients—everyone I met at the beginning of my work considered me an outsider, and casework had to wait upon better acquaintance . . . (Brown, 1922:187).

During her years in Dakota County, Brown's thinking on rural practice and education was not only crystalized but



also disseminated, for in 1922, she shared her knowledge in published articles and presentations. She also attended and "distinguished herself as a member of Miss Richmond's Institute of Casework" (*Survey*, 1924:429) the famous summer gathering of charity organization leaders at the New York School of Philanthropy. The central theme of Brown's writing was always the adaptation of the principles of casework to the rural community. Brown emphasized the salience of environmental factors in the country, the importance of education and prevention as well as remediation, and the central role of what we now call "natural networks"—then volunteers—in the provision of services. In the "Use of Volunteers in Rural Social Work" Brown wrote that while in the city "the volunteer while desirable was optional", in the country, "the volunteer was a necessity" (Brown, 1922b:268). Further highlighting the importance of the work of local residents, Brown stated:

In town the volunteer is on trial. In the country it is the social worker who is in that equivocal position. The city volunteer usually works in a district far from her own home and learns both method and facts regarding her case from the trained worker . . . but in the country the same trained worker may find that the volunteer has been a neighbor of her client for thirty years and knows more about his family history, and present situation than the average social worker . . . Often this information is accompanied by a definite theory of treatment which the neighborhood may have employed for years . . . (Brown, 1922b:268).

Brown concluded her observations stressing the social worker's need for an open mind, humility and "tact in abundance," advice which is still applicable and sound in rural areas.

### A Decade at the Family Welfare Association and A Year at the Social Science Research Council

Toward the end of 1923, Brown moved from Minnesota to take the position of Associate Field Director in charge of eight Southeastern states at the Family Welfare Association

of America (FWAA). *The Survey* reported that the American Association for Organizing Family Social Work had recently appointed Josephine C. Brown as a field worker to work in Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida and South Carolina and to be based in Louisville, Kentucky (*Survey*, 1924:429). Unfortunately, although Brown worked for over a decade with the FWAA, no records of her activities there could be located. According to authoritative sources at FSAA, Brown's field service position included extensive travel and probably took her into member agencies providing consultation and support to local staff. Brown was clearly the FWAA's rural authority, for as we have already discussed, she spoke for the agency on rural matters at meetings of the Social Work Council. Furthermore, between 1929 and 1930, Brown was permitted to take a leave of absence from FWAA to act as Secretary of the Sub-Committee on Rural Social Work of the Committee on Social and Economic Research in Agriculture of the Social Science Research Council, a prestigious research organization based in New York City.

At the Social Science Research Council, Brown worked with some of the leading rural sociologists of the period, such as Benson Landis, Edmund de S. Bruner, Dwight Sanderson and others, and with the prominent figures involved in rural social work at the time, for example, Joanna Colcord of the Russell Sage Foundation, Gertrude Vaile of Minnesota and Emma D. Lundberg, Director of Research of the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration of New York State. While it can be said that those acquaintances served Brown well when she had to develop programs for the training of workers for the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, her friendship with the rural sociology and agricultural college leadership made her the target of criticism from professionally overzealous social work colleagues who opposed coalitions with sociology and rural sociology as a threat to the still tenuous social work identity.<sup>3</sup>

During her year at the Social Science Research Council, Brown assisted in the production of a volume entitled *Research in Rural Social Work Scope and Method* (Black, 1932).

Three of the reports on the "state-of-the-art" were authored by Brown, who was listed on the volume's title page as the executive secretary of the Special Advisory Committee on Rural Social Work. The first report outlined rural social work as an area for research, listing methods such as case studies, analysis of case records, reports of social agencies, census reports and others as alternatives for investigators to consider. The second report evaluated the effectiveness of various county organizations in handling different types of rural social work. The recommendations of this report have an extraordinarily contemporary ring. Brown pointed out that in rural services many problems resulted from (a) organizations modeled in urban settings and superimposed in rural communities; (b) overzealous outside agencies eager to impose "mandatory laws"; (c) competition for limited local resources; (d) overworked rural social workers who then render sketchy services; (e) the stigmatization of social work as dealing only with "special" populations; and (f) little sharing of responsibility and poor use of local people. The third research report of the volume dealt with the training of rural case workers. Brown stressed the importance of utilizing the network of agricultural colleges to train as many workers as possible in the basics of social casework applicable to rural clients, underscoring environmental or community factors in casework interventions. As has already been noted, these ideas did not make Brown popular with many social work leaders of the more exclusive schools who supported specialized, graduate level education. Brown further expanded on the topics of these brief reports in *The Rural Community and Social Casework* (Brown, 1933).

After a year with the Social Science Research Council, Brown returned to the FWAA but must have spent more time at the headquarters in New York City, for between 1930 and 1932, she also taught two courses in Rural Social Problems at the New York School of Social Work. It is also known that Brown was for a while Acting Field Director and Membership Secretary at the FWAA.

*The Rural Community and Social Case Work* (Brown, 1933), a seminal work that was to guide rural social work for many

years appeared at the height of the Depression era. The book brought forth much controversy among social workers, for many controversial principles such as rural generalism were unequivocally stated. In the foreword, Emma O. Lundberg of the New York ERA, suggested that the lessons being learned through "the necessities of economical and humane relief administration" would make permanent impressions and that Brown's book would prove essential for a long term program.

Lundberg's words proved rather prophetic on at least two accounts. First, the states' temporary Emergency Relief Administrations (ERAs) provided the framework for the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) and for the establishment of a county-based system of public assistance, family social work and child welfare. Secondly, it was not only Brown's book that carried the rural social work message to remote county offices, but Brown herself, in her role as Administrative Assistant in the FERA and as the person in charge of the vast and ambitious training program for rural relief workers sponsored by this agency.

Other studies have looked in detail at the themes of *The Rural Community and Social Case Work*<sup>4fi</sup> Here suffice it to say that the book expounded upon Brown's farm experience and understanding of rural life, drew heavily from the works of the rural scholars of the time (N.L. Sims, K. L. Butterfield, C. J. Galpin and J. M. Williams) many of whom were personally known to Brown, and set forth Brown's proposals for a county-based, "undifferentiated" (generalist) program of rural casework that incorporated the worker's basic knowledge and empathy for rural life and his/her understanding of local rural leaders and resources. Brown foresaw rural needs as inevitably leading to the establishment of a public "casework" agency, but was not averse to utilizing a "private society" in the unusual county where one existed and could better lay the foundations for the public effort.

Much of the success of any social agency's program rested, according to Brown, upon the qualifications and experience of the workers. She advocated training that dealt specially with rural conditions; she believed that extensive

experience was required for employment in the rural counties: —a total of “three years as a minimum requirement and five years for the executive secretary” (Brown, 1933:72). Brown also felt that certain personality characteristics were a prerequisite for rural work:

Case work in the average rural county must be done without the help of specialized social agencies and other resources which are usually available in a city. The rural worker, therefore, should have initiative and ingenuity in developing resources and in recognizing and using whatever facilities may be at hand.

If she is to work in a satisfactory partnership with the people in the county, she should be willing to efface herself and let others take credit for the accomplishments in which she has had a share (Brown, 1933:70).

Brown’s comprehensive and meticulous instructions to county workers made *The Rural Community and Social Casework* the target of both well-meaning and critical professional fun. In 1936, as the book was being widely circulated, a poem, “why i do not think i would make a good rural case worker” (Rettig, 1936:15) was published in *The Survey*. The social worker poet suggested that, having read Brown’s book, she did not want to be a rural case worker “on account” of not claiming to be “a superwoman or a paragon.”

### In the Limelight: The FERA and WPA Years

On April 9, 1934, Brown became an Administrative Assistant at the FERA offices in Washington, D.C. There she worked with Harry Hopkins, Administrator and Aubrey Williams, Assistant Administrator. The Civilian Personnel Records files (National Personnel Records Center) indicate that she was appointed to that position at a salary of 6,000 per annum. Her status as a federal employee changed at various times as she moved from the FERA to the WPA in 1935, and later in 1939, when she became a “consultant” at the same agency.

Although Brown performed various functions at the FERA, it was the training of FERA workers that brought her

notoriety among her social work colleagues. Through its Division of Training and Research, FERA made available substantial sums of money for the training of relief workers in various states. Short-term institutes and seminars and intense supervision were used as instructional tools. But the most important FERA social work training project was probably the sending of selected workers for training courses to schools of social work across the nation. Brown's plan for the training of relief workers proposed to distribute available federal monies on the basis of "the need for training in various states" (Brown, 1934). Brown wanted to insure that the federal monies allocated for training did not "replace money from the state budgets which ordinarily would be spent for institutes and so forth" (Brown, 1934). She intended the FERA training program to be something additional.

The FERA training plan consisted of two parts: "(1) to make it possible for the state administrators to send a certain number of carefully selected people to schools of social work for a semester or a quarter; (2) to provide, in accordance with the needs of the state and probably on a regional basis, for planned institute programs" (Brown, 1934). This second component of the FERA training plan was, in contemporary language, a comprehensive in-service training program and involved, in some places, putting on the payroll of the state administration a "qualified teacher of case work" who devoted full time to planning and giving institutes, generally in one or two states. Institutes utilized the facilities of the state universities or other educational institutions, but were under the auspices of the various state relief administrations. It was through this second component of the FERA training program and by using resources within the states to improve the skills of local workers on the job that Brown hoped to meet the broad need for better prepared relief workers.

According to the records, the FERA training plan was carried out fairly close to Brown's original scheme. Interestingly enough, it was the long-term training component of the plan that brought forth the most severe criticisms.

Schools of social work that had not been selected to do long-term FERA training objected to the program and state politicians responding to their higher education constituencies also joined the critical chorus.

At the inception of the plan in 1934, Brown made it clear that the only schools that would participate in the FERA long-term training were those schools recognized by the American Association of Schools of Social Work (AASSW). On this matter, Brown wrote:

There are in the country at least 60 educational institutions which claim to have schools of social work. I have no way myself of evaluating the kind of work being done. I know that some of the work is very poor. The American Association of Social Workers have a Committee on Relations with Schools of Social Work which is in despair over the task of evaluating the courses given in these institutions.

The only way it seems possible to protect this office from the barrage of claims to consideration in this program is to limit the schools to which the students are sent to the members of the Association of Schools of Social Work. Even within this group, perhaps, there are schools which are not of very good quality and I want very much to get those schools to put on additional faculties and better facilities . . . If we go outside this membership we have no answer . . . (Brown, 1934).

Schools who were not members of the AASSW were only permitted to conduct short institutes for personnel within their states. As Brown had anticipated, the decision brought on a barrage of complaints, particularly from state institutions, most of which did not have schools of Social Work affiliated with the AASSW, but usually had departments of Sociology that offered social work courses (for example, Oklahoma and Utah). From a biographer's perspective, Brown's decision to include in the FERA long-term training program only the more established and exclusive AASSW member schools was dissonant with her own ideas and commitments to the rural field and with her previously sympathetic stance on the land-grant institutions and the agricultural colleges. The schools approved by the AASSW

tended to be private and located in the large urban centers of the East Coast and the Mid-West, although as time went by, other less urban schools were accepted into membership by the AASSW. In this instance, it would appear that Brown's decision reflected more a pragmatic administrative judgement call than her personal commitments. But, in spite of this, as is the case with important decisions, the matter was not laid to rest for many years and those who initially benefitted from Brown's judgement became her bitter critics later on.

After the emergency period passed, Brown drew severe criticism from some prominent members of the AASSW when she apparently suggested that training for public welfare workers could be expanded to include the state universities and agricultural colleges of the nation. At that time, prominent social work leaders severely criticized Brown's proposal insinuating that it constituted "normal school training" for social workers and "the starting of state university schools of social work wholesale" (Wisner, 1937). Elizabeth Wisner of Tulane wrote to Edith Abbott of Chicago:

As to Miss Brown's plan, I was inadvertently drawn into a discussion of her statement during a brief conference with Miss Lenroot.<sup>5</sup> In August, Miss Lenroot wrote me that Miss Brown was making a special study of education for her and asked if I could see her in New Orleans. We had a very general discussion and I left the conference feeling very vague as to the study. . . .

During my conference with Miss Lenroot, she asked me to read Miss Brown's memorandum, a copy of which had been forwarded to Miss Breckinridge but which I had never seen and did not have an opportunity to read carefully. One section caught my eye and it was the one referring to the agricultural colleges, etc. I pointed out to Miss Lenroot that Miss Brown had in an earlier study, made in cooperation with Mr. Carstens and various other people (for the purpose I believe, of submitting some kind of application to the Social Science Research Council), emphasized the importance of the agricultural colleges in rural training, home economics, etc., and that



I knew people had been critical of this study and that in my opinion a repetition of that kind of a recommendation would be most unfortunate.

The only other point discussed at any length was in a later conference with Miss Van Driel present. She had, of course, been furnished with a copy of Miss Brown's memorandum and had time to thoroughly consider it. She felt very strongly that Miss Brown was proposing "normal school training," as she expressed it, and argued most effectively against any such plan. I thought it was most fortunate that she was there to discuss the memorandum with Miss Lenroot and I certainly agreed with what she said. On my return to New Orleans, I commented . . . on the dangers of having Miss Brown formulate educational memos . . . (Wisner, 1937).

Eidith Abbott, whose school at the University of Chicago had received many FERA students, joined in the criticism of Brown's attempts to broaden social work training beyond a few major universities. In a letter written in 1937, Abbott commented that she considered "very dangerous and unsound" the plan Brown was working on. She added, "of course, her only experience is with an emergency program and both she and Katherine (presumably Lenroot) think you can start a new school over night in every state university and turn out social workers wholesale" (Abbott, 1937).

History showed that the controversy over the provision of training for public welfare workers particularly in rural states which began circa 1935<sup>6</sup> culminated with the establishment of a second accrediting body for social work education, the National Association of Schools of Social Administration (NASSA) in 1942, separate from the AASSW (Martinez-Brawley, 1981; Leighninger, 1984). For a decade, the NASSA accredited mostly the land-grant universities and agricultural colleges in their efforts to establish social work training outside the large metropolitan centers.

Clearly, becoming involved in the controversy over levels and type of training appropriate for rural and public welfare workers was one of the most problematic aspects of Brown's professional career, for she made enemies among influential social work leaders who apparently ostracized her professionally after the FERA years. Although the records of

the AASSW do not contain any other substantial references to Brown's activities beyond 1937, the University of Chicago files in the CSWE collection at the University of Minnesota contain further references to Brown's unpopular stance on the issue of training for public welfare work. As late as 1943, Edith Abbott was asked by Leona Massoth, then secretary of the AASSW, to comment on a manuscript by Brown entitled "The Professional Education and Experience of Federal Emergency Relief Administration Scholarship Students" (Massoth, 1943). Abbott refused to even consider the manuscript for publication in the *Social Service Review* commenting that "her relations with Miss Brown" had "already been so acrimonious" over disagreements on the FERA training that she (Abbott) thought it best "not to see the material and reject it" (Abbott, 1943). In relation to publication of the manuscript by the AASSW, Abbott further commented to secretary Massoth: "I should certainly think it would be wicked to put any money into such a publication. It might be worth mimeographing, but I would think that would be the most that should be done" (Abbott, 1943). Whether Abbott was correct or incorrect in her assessment of Brown's manuscript is irrelevant here. What is important to note is that Brown paid dearly for her unorthodoxy regarding training issues.

There is no question, however, that Brown's endeavors helped develop a cadre of social workers for the provision of relief. In 1935, Brown reported to the National Conference of Social Work that the FERA's "greatest venture had been its popularly known training program in which . . . through special grants of money, 39 states secured for a number of their present and prospective staff members, training opportunities of one-half year each at accredited schools of social work" (Brown, 1935:236). Brown reported that 912 students had attended, in one year alone, more than 21 schools and that over half of them were planning to go back to school to finish their graduate degrees. While by-and-large the training was rated highly by the students, Brown discovered that many programs focused entirely on city problems with no reference to rural problems ever made. Additionally, as a

pragmatist, Brown was concerned with the gaps that existed between the theory taught in the schools and the realities of practice.

There is not only a gap between urban teaching and rural experience but between the old social casework and what it has to give us which can be applied to the administration of unemployment relief. There is also a gap between the entire content of social work training as we have known it and the practical, growing, vital needs of the new public welfare . . . (Brown, 1935:236-37).

It may have been that because of the lack of relevancy that many training courses had for rural workers, Brown became involved and circulated the "unpopular" training plan to which Wisner and Abbott referred. Unfortunately, more details of this plan were not found in any of the records searched although, as late as 1943, Abbott was still making reference to her role in putting a stop to "many of the very foolish things that Harry (presumably Hopkins) and Miss Brown were planning to do and in fact had already begun to do in some places" (Abbott, 1943).

In 1936, Brown once again addressed the National Conference of Social Work to provide a synopsis of the relief situation on the dawn of the passage of the Social Security Act. Brown suggested that although the major objective of the FERA had been the provision of unemployment relief, "at the same time every possible encouragement had been given to the development of permanent programs of public welfare and public assistance" (Brown, 1936:428). Under the FERA, she said, the pendulum had swung far in the direction of federal control" (Brown, 1936:431). She acknowledged the fact that with the advent of the Social Security Act, many social workers had seen "with intense regret the responsibility for public welfare and public assistance placed upon the states and localities" (Brown, 1936:432). But she was hopeful that the improvements established under the FERA would continue under local auspices, and asked for social work cooperation on these efforts:

Permanent public welfare programs must be indigenous. They must strike deep roots in the understanding and support of

private citizens and public officials. They must be wanted if they are to endure. . . .

In the states the efforts of social workers are badly needed to back existing welfare departments as they work for high standards of personnel and relief; to promote sound public welfare legislation . . . to secure adequate state appropriations for the social security categories and for general public assistance (Brown, 1936:432).

Thus, in spite of her experience as a federal administrator and her doubts about the resources of many local communities, Brown continued to believe in rural social work practice that capitalized upon local resources and had the potential for being responsive to the unique conditions of the various states. Her beliefs, however, never obscured her perceptions of reality, for in 1939, she wrote that in spite of the FERA structure, and probably because "local boards and committees and other devices for the encouragement of local participation and understanding" had not been used intensively enough under FERA" (Brown, 1940:325) a public welfare program had not taken root in local communities. She further observed:

The period of transition, after the liquidation of the FERA at the end of 1935, stands out as a time of confusion and near chaos in public relief. It was a time of uncertainty, insecurity and even terror for the relief client who could not get a work relief job and who had no sure niche in the developing categorical programs. Suffering was acute in too many sections of the country. Funds for general relief were inadequate or entirely lacking in state after state (Brown, 1940:325).

By the end of 1937, Josephine C. Brown's activities within the WPA changed in nature. A humorous note appearing in *The Survey* (Survey, 1937) remarked that everyone had thought she had resigned from the WPA in favor of a long vacation, but that in fact she had only gone to Europe briefly and had returned to her WPA desk to do a special job of research and writing. Her Civilian Personnel Records indicate a code change in 1937 and a void furlough in 1939.

She retained the status of "consultant" until her termination in 1943.

In a vita Brown prepared for Catholic University (National Catholic School of Social Service Archives) Brown states that between 1937 and 1939, she carried out a study of public relief for the publication of a book. Her second book, *Public Relief 1929-1939* which appeared in 1940 was dedicated to the "regional social workers of the FERA and WPA, in recognition of their distinguished contribution to public welfare in the United States." In this volume, Brown undertook the monumental task of explaining and documenting the states' relief situation prior to the establishment of the FERA in 1933, the purposes and workings of the FERA, the transition to state-relief systems, (with the WPA taking responsibility for the able-bodied unemployed) and the establishment of state systems under the Social Security Act.

Throughout the volume she reveals and documents Harry Hopkins' commitment to retain the best staff of the FERA and to insure that the state administrations and the WPA availed themselves of the best trained personnel. This however, did not always happen in spite of Washington's memoranda, for, "as a matter of fact, several states promptly effected a complete liquidation of their Emergency Relief Administrations with no immediate provision for another agency to administer relief. The social work staffs were allowed to scatter and the public welfare departments which were set up later found it necessary to start all over again with new personnel (Brown, 1940:318).

Brown's public relief volume was a major contribution to the public welfare literature. In her ending paragraphs, Brown best summarizes the accomplishments of an era:

Government relief rather than private relief has become a matter of course. In 1929, private relief loomed large in the consciousness of the socially-minded citizen . . . At present all but one percent of the huge total comes from public treasuries. Equally axiomatic is the practice of making public agencies responsible for the administration of public funds (Brown, 1940:424).

Brown also dealt with what a decade of efforts in the public relief field failed to accomplish:

Outside the inadequacies and inequalities of relief benefits, the most serious problem in public welfare today is found in the multiplicity of agencies, of categories, of standards, of methods of intake and of definitions of eligibility. The local confusion resulting from this complexity has serious implications for agency staffs and for the recipients . . . Next in importance to supplying Federal grants for general relief, and an equalization system for all of the Federal grants to the states, is the provision of a planned coordinated and integrated program, Federal, state, and some approach to equality of treatment of all persons in need who apply for public aid (Brown, 1940:424).

These statements were written by Brown in 1940 but retain a contemporary ring nearly five decades later.

#### The War Years: Life as an Educator

Although Brown had always been concerned about the training of social workers, concentrating first on the needs of rural areas and later on the needs of the public welfare field, she never held a permanent academic position until 1939, when she was appointed at the rank of Instructor at the Catholic University School of Social Work in Washington, D.C. According to her vita, Brown had taught courses in rural social work at the New York School of Social Work during the years at the FWAA, but they must have been of short duration for no records on Brown's tenure there could be secured.

Brown's connection with Catholic education pre-dated her appointment at Catholic University. At some point during the thirties, she had converted to Catholicism. The details of her conversion could not be reconstructed, but according to one of her colleagues at Catholic University, she devoted much time to religiously sponsored helping activities, having at some point become a Benedictine oblate, that is, a member of a lay organizations which followed the teachings of St. Benedict and met regularly at St. Anselm Abbey in Washington, D.C. (Mohler, 1938). Her conversion

to Catholicism was also corroborated in a memorial address given by a friend after Brown's death in Princeton, New Jersey (Cuyler, 1977).

As early as 1936, Brown had addressed a forum at the School of Social Work at Catholic University speaking on the relationship of government and social work and carefully explaining the role of both the voluntary and the public sectors in the provision of services (Brown, 1936b). Brown believed that social work had made an indelible mark in the provision of emergency relief. Brown was cognizant of the fact that most social workers employed by the FERA had come from the private sector but was emphatic in stating the need for those social workers to understand that the conception of social work in a private agency was not always applicable to the large public agency. Brown acknowledged the importance of politics in both the private and the public fields, although she humorously conveyed her awareness that at least at the time, it was only in the public sector that social workers dared acknowledge the effects of political activity. As it can easily be seen, much of Brown's thinking was ahead of her time.

Brown's connections with the Catholic University School of Social Service were formalized in 1939. Brown's expertise were the areas of rural relief and public welfare, and she stated that in her letter of application to the school. It is reported that she taught courses at the two Catholic social work institutions which existed in Washington, D.C., at the time, the Catholic University School of Social Work and the National Catholic School of Social Service (Mohler, 1983). Eventually in 1947, before Brown's retirement, the two institutions would merge into today's National Catholic School of Social Service, The Catholic University of America. During her tenure at The National Catholic School of Social Service, Brown was in charge of the Public Welfare Sequence, served as Secretary of the faculty, and as Director of Admissions.

Records at the National Catholic School of Social Service do not indicate that any special consideration had been

given in terms of academic rank or teaching load to the broad spectrum of expertise Brown had brought to the faculty. One of Brown's colleagues recalls that Brown carried quite a heavy teaching load and that few if any of her contemporaries were aware of the stature Brown had enjoyed in the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. Brown's humble and unpretentious ways would have underplayed her former accomplishments and stressed comradeship as a member of the faculty. She was seen as a rather quiet and reserved person.

During the War years, Brown became very active in a variety of war related efforts. On September 1, 1943, she was appointed by the Board of Commissioners of the District of Columbia to the Civilian War Services Board of the Civilian War Services Division. Apparently, the Dean of the School of Social Work considered Brown's participation in this time-consuming endeavor one of the contributions the School could make to the war effort (Brown, undated). One of her main assignments as a member of the Board was to serve on the Child Care and Protection Committee and on the Family Security Committee. The first was responsible for functioning on an advisory capacity to directors of nursery services and the second provided a unique service to draftees and their families known as the Draft Aid Center.

During the War, Brown also served on the Citizen's Committee on Day Care Services which tried to secure public funds in the District of Columbia to provide day care programs for children of working mothers. This committee was unsuccessful in those efforts and eventually established the Foster Day Care and Counselling Association, a private agency funded by the Washington Community Chest to carry out those duties. The Foster Day Care and Counselling Association was continued beyond the war years.

Because of these activities, Brown became very involved in day care issues and made frequent public appearances representing the School of Social Service. She spoke authoritatively of her concern for the children of working mothers: "Women in war industries," she stated, "should be



recruited from those with no children or those with children above school age" (*Richmond News Leader*, 1942). "War-Working Mothers Asked to Stay Home With Children," a headline in *The Richmond News Leader* read after one of Brown's talks. Brown declared her beliefs to be consistent with the policies of the War Manpower Commission and the Children's Bureau.

We have come to recognize that as members of the labor force women of present generations owe many of their gains to those who answered the call of employers during the war. Given Brown's progressive ideas in most areas, her opposition to working mothers during the war appears incongruous. It must be realized, however, that Brown always weighed her decisions carefully and acted not so much on ideological grounds as on pragmatic but careful assessments of specific situations. For whatever reasons, Brown believed that social workers should counsel mothers of young children against war-related employment. Yet, she also advocated that good day care provisions had to be made for the care of the children of those mothers who decided to work in spite of contrary advice. As a social worker, Brown was very involved in the making of those provisions.

During the War years, Brown also became concerned about the issue of mass economic insecurity of all workers. She did considerable public speaking and writing,<sup>7</sup> primarily to Catholic audiences, criticizing the way in which the United States economy fostered insecurity among working people.

Throughout the past century periodic industrial depressions were taken for granted—as well as the existence of a state of economic insecurity in the lives of most, if not all, working people.

The framework within which all these problems have developed is an economic system which operates on the theory that any individual has unlimited freedom and absolute right to use capital for profit regardless of the welfare of others. In this system, human rights and welfare are made subservient to the interest of trade. The successful man has a right to all

his profits, however large they may be, regardless of the needs or interest of others.

As a result of this system our economic machinery has become man's master instead of his servant. The worker's employment and economic advancement are not relative to the real value of his services but to the extent to which his employer can profit by his enterprise (Brown, 1942:10).

Finally, a third theme that preoccupied Brown during the years of the war was the relationship between private charity and governmental relief activity. She had clearly expressed her commitment to the role of government in relief during the depression years and had repeatedly stated the role of organized charities and private citizens in welfare work. As her thinking matured, and as she distanced herself from public life, she continued to examine the relationship between the voluntary and public sectors and to interpret the need for cooperation and discernment on their respective responsibilities. It must be remembered that this was a controversial issue for social workers even after the passage of the Social Security Act. "Because the needs of millions of people is too great to be met by the resources of private citizens and charitable organizations," Brown wrote in 1942, "it is the duty of the state to make provisions for them, in addition to instituting regulatory measures looking to the securing of the rights of the workers and the reform of the system itself" (Brown, 1942:10). The cooperation between citizens, private agencies and government was essential, Brown thought, although it had often been endangered by the attitude of the first two, failing to realize their close and inevitable alliance with public interests.

In the midst of all this activity, Brown earned a Master of Arts in Sociology from the Catholic University in 1945 and was promoted to the rank of Assistant Professor at the School of Social Service. Finally, in 1951, shortly before her retirement, she was promoted to the rank of Associate Professor.

During her years at the Catholic University of America,

Brown discovered that her eyesight was failing due to cataracts and glaucoma. In July 1952, she tendered her resignation from the faculty, announcing her retirement to the city of Princeton.

### Her Retirement and Death

Little could be ascertained about the final years of Brown's life in Princeton. For the most part, she lived a quiet existence, centered around religious activities. Probably due to her severely failing eyesight, she did not participate actively in professional organizations any more, although the membership register of NASW continued to list her until 1977. She apparently maintained her long-time professional association and friendship with Katherine Lenroot, former chief of the Children's Bureau, who had also retired to Princeton.<sup>8</sup>

According to a friend who knew and read to Brown as her eyesight progressively worsened, Brown remained a quiet and contented person until the time of her death. She seldom spoke of her past professional life and her requests were simple and brief. She enjoyed being read to, and her favorite books and "those about the St. Lawrence River which flowed by her native town of Ogdensburg, or else books about Eleanor Roosevelt with whom she had done social service work in Washington" (Cuyler, 1977). Brown's fervent Catholicism remained strong until her death; yet, her religious practices were very ecumenical in nature, before ecumenism was popular. She walked to mass at the Aquinas Chapel in Princeton for as long as she could, although she had to cross a busy intersection. She was also a member of Trinity Church Episcopalian Intercessor's Group, through which prayer were said at home for the needy all over the world.

Josephine Brown died in Princeton, New Jersey on October 25, 1976, four days after her 90th birthday.

### Summary and Conclusions

Biography serves not only to reconstruct the lives of the prominent but also to help us interpret our own actions and

make us cognizant that the vested interests of today can and do, indeed, shape the future. Josephine Chapin Brown was one of many women pioneers who embraced causes ahead of her times and was sometimes subtly and sometimes overtly chastized by her peers. Interestingly enough, Brown would have probably not seen herself as a champion of causes but rather as a pragmatist doing what needed to be done with as much common sense as could be mustered. Brown's offending key figures in social work was probably unintentional; her embracing ways of thinking that turned out to be more democratic than those espoused by her social work contemporaries was probably also coincidental. Brown's experiences were quite different from those of her contemporary colleagues and her actions were shaped by those experiences. Brown's sense of professionalism was more open, more interdisciplinary, more secure in many ways than that of her colleagues. At a time when social work rigidly insisted on graduate training, Brown saw that jobs in the country (and even in the cities) were opening up for those without any training at all. She tried to impose a measure of realism onto the professional paradigm but became unpopular for daring to do so. For those committed to innovation in the professions, the price Brown paid for her unconventional thinking well illustrates that threats to the paradigm in academic disciplines or professions are not viewed benovolently, and even if eventually the new challenges are accepted, their initiators often fall into obscurity. It has taken many decades for the profession to hear about, if not recognize, the merits of Brown's challenges and contributions.

1. This manuscript is based on a laborious reconstruction of Brown's life which began with the perusal of *The Survey* pages and lasted over three years. The search extended to records in the Social Welfare History Archives of the University of Minnesota, the Archives of the Catholic University of America, the Bryn Mawr Archives, the National Archives at the Library of Congress and the Katherine Lenroot Collection at Columbia University. Interviews with Dorothy Mohler, a former colleague of Brown's at Catholic University, provided additional valuable

information. The memories of a former secretary of Brown at Catholic University provided clues as to the place of her retirement and death, and finally, correspondence with Marjorie Cuyler of Princeton, a friend of Brown during the final years of her life, helped supplement the written record and corroborate this researcher's inferences about Brown's personal style and attributes.

2. The Minutes of the National Social Work Council meeting of March 7, 1930, list the river as St. Cloud. This might be a typographical error since the village of Marine is on the St. Croix River.
3. Enlightening in this regard, is for example, a letter written by Elizabeth Wisner of Tulane to Edith Abbott of the University of Chicago, November 3, 1937. Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, CSWE Collection, AASSW Series.
4. See for example, Martinez-Brawley, Emilia E. *Pioneer Efforts in Rural Social Welfare*, (Penn State Press, 1980) and *Seven Decades of Rural Social Work*, (Praeger, 1981); see also Davenport, Joseph and Judith, "Josephine Brown's *The Rural Community and Social Case Work: A Golden Anniversary Perspective*" (paper presented at the 8th National Institute of Social Work in Rural Areas, Cheney, WA., 1983).
5. Katherine Lenroot was Chief of the Children's Bureau between 1934 and 1951.
6. Correspondence in the FERA/WPA files in the National Archives showed that as early as 1935 Brown had been involved in discussing social work training for the rural field vs. training in home economics with the staff of the Georgia Relief Administration (Wilma Van Dusseldorp and Alan Johnstone). Brown had remained strong in emphasizing the importance of social work training for rural services. Yet it was clear that politically, from where she sat, she could not disregard the contributions of other helping disciplines which like home-economics had a long-standing association with agriculture.
7. See, for example, "Social Duties Rest on All," *The Richmond News Leader*, Tuesday, November 10, 1942.
8. In 1968, on the occasion of an anniversary celebration at the National Catholic School of Social Service, Brown declined an invitation to the celebration on her behalf and that of Katherine Lenroot. Letter from Josephine Brown to Dean Ferris, March 31, 1968, National Catholic School of Social Service Archives, The Catholic University of America.

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SOCIAL WORK'S PROFESSIONAL MISTAKE:  
CONFUSING STATUS FOR CONTROL  
AND LOSING BOTH

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*The dimensions of control and power supporting monopoly are central to the professional notion. These factors are implicit in the attribute professional formulation traditionally put forth and adopted by Social Work. This paper asserts that social work leadership between 1915 and 1952 misunderstood or ignored these crucial dynamics. This "mistake" led to practice methodology (casework) and educational policies (graduate-only) that sought status rather than occupational control. This flawed analysis split the occupation in its formative years. The article concludes that the result has been social work's inability to gain professional standing.*

The notion of a profession contains a fundamental assumption: any occupational group wishing to be recognized as professional must first define and exercise control over the boundaries of its realm of activity. Fundamentally, this boundary establishes control over members in the profession

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by identifying who is "inside" and who is "outside." This factor creates the foundation of authority thereby forming a basis for the claims of "expertise" embedded in the professional ideal (Gerst and Jacobs, 1976; Johnson, 1981; Starr, 1982: 3-29). This paper discusses social work's lack of understanding of this assumption, and the results of this mistaken analysis.

The issues identified in this discussion as central to social work's historical professionalization process are: 1) development of a scientific base coupled with a communicable technique; and 2) the subsequent, and related, educational policies that initially spelled out the roles of "professional" and "non-professional."

The resolution of the first issue was CASEWORK, and the second was the GRADUATE ONLY model for professional education. The period under review begins in 1915 with Flexner's speech to the Conference of Charities and Corrections (Flexner, 1915:576-90), and ends with the formation in 1953 of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE).<sup>1</sup> Recent comment and discussion from within social work (Specht et.al., 1984; Howe, 1980; Austin, 1983; Leighninger, 1980 and 1984)<sup>2</sup> indicate that we still struggle with the issue of professionalization and the education/training dimension continues to be a focus for active, even heated debate. In an effort to contribute to this timely concern, this paper highlights what are believed to be historical reasons contributing to social work's "mistaken analysis" and offers thoughts on the consequences both past and present.

This paper first identifies the dimensions of CONTROL and MONOPOLY as central to the notion of a profession and the professionalization process. Applying these two dimensions and the power perspective they represent to social work's professional development, I assert that leadership during the period under review either misunderstood or ignored their importance. The mistaken analysis supported practice and educational philosophies and policies that failed

to implement the requisite control and monopoly over the logical realm of social work's early occupational activity—the public welfare sector. Instead, the foundation that was laid split social work and actually undermined its efforts toward achieving professional standing. Specifically, the conclusion is drawn that active, and successful, resistance to undergraduate training/education as entry-level professional preparation was a key factor that hampered social work's quest for full professional development.

Before turning to the discussion, I want to emphasize that the following review does not argue that professions and professionalization are good or bad. I have taken the historical record of social work at its word; that is, it wanted to be a profession. I think the goal has not been achieved, and I believe much energy has been dissipated by social work as a result of our flawed pursuit. Ivor Kraft has pointedly observed:

Despite deliberate efforts . . . to promote social work to the status of a dominant and learned profession . . . these efforts did not take, and it is now clear that social work is destined to remain among the "heteronomous" or subfusc professions in our culture (Kraft, 1980:2).

Taking Kraft's point, this paper clarifies and suggests possible historical reasons, emanating from within the field, that have contributed to social work's difficulty and failure to realize its professional goal.

## Professions and Professionalization

In the early Twentieth Century, a resurgence of professions occurred in the United States (Starr, 1982:3–144). Medicine was the dominant example of this resurgence, and provided the paradigm for other occupational groups, like social work, who were seeking recognition as professions. Medicine's success was idealized and incorporated into what became known as the Attribute Model of Professions (Thoren, 1972; Stein, 1968; Kraft, 1969; Feldstein, 1971;

Leighninger, 1980, 1984). In this model, desirable characteristics, or traits, are identified and an occupation presumably reaches professional standing by developing the noted characteristics.

The Attribute Model is flawed, and one succinct statement of its primary flaw in regard to social work is provided by Simpkins:

The attempted identification of social work as a profession proceeds by comparing attributes and by emphasizing workers' unique knowledge and skill. The argument is of a syllogistic form: professions are activities identifiable by particular traits, therefore social work is a profession . . . Whatever may be thought of the logic of this argument, the principal flaw lies in the major premise which is based on a naive acceptance of 'trait' theory. In fact, no agreed list of professional attributes exists, most are just ragbags tailored to suit the needs of whatever group is using them to aspire to professional status (Simpkin, 1983:119-120).

The enshrining of the syllogistic nature of the attribute model had occurred in social work by 1920, and the *ends* (traits) of the process became viewed and confused as the *Means*.

Feldstein (1971; also Goode, 1969) clearly states the essential nature of the occupational professional boundary: "If a profession is to function with any kind of power it must control not only the activity of its members, but the activity of the other workers in the territory or industry over which it claims expertise." The power and control perspective does not refute the usefulness of attributes, but places them in an appropriately dependent, secondary position. The attributes represent desirable characteristics that come after the would-be profession has mapped out its basic boundaries. The programmatic expression of these boundaries has customarily been the process of training and education, leading to acceptance into the professional circle. This view of professions acknowledges the necessity of control and the resulting monopoly as prerequisites for gaining power, recognition, and/or the status exemplified by the attributes. By

applying the power and control perspectives, rather than status, to a historical review of social work's occupational development the nature of social work's mistaken professional development gains clarity and provides insights into current difficult and contentious professional issues.

### The Search for a Scientific Base, a Communicable Technique, and Practice Unity:

In 1915, social work confronted the question of professionalization by inviting Abraham Flexner to address the Conference of Charities and Corrections. Flexner concluded that social work was not a profession.<sup>3</sup> Two years later in an apparent response to Flexner, the first delineation of an individual practice emphasis, the casework method, appeared in Mary Richmond's (1917) book *Social Diagnosis*. As Leiby (1978:122) notes, *Social Diagnosis* was an organized statement that served "to transform (friendly visiting) into the notion of deliberate and constructive case-work."

A few months after the publication of *Social Diagnosis*, at the annual meeting of the National Conference of Social Work (NCSW), in a paper titled "The Social Caseworker's Tasks," Richmond addressed Flexner's 1915 verdict that social work was not a profession by asserting that social work now had a scientific method called "casework" (Drew, 1983). This method contained the distinguishing characteristics of "skill in discovering the social relationships by which a given personality had been shaped; second, *ability* to get at the central core of difficulty in these relationships; and third, *power* to utilize the direct action of mind upon mind in their adjustment (Drew, 1983: 39). As Lubove (1965) has pointed out, casework evolved into social work's primary technology exerting significant influence on the field's subsequent development.

During the Twenties, following the emergence of Richmond's casework formulation, social work experienced a period of great expansion. A national organization, the American Association of Social Workers (AASW) was

founded in 1921. The AASW's stated purpose was that: "acting together, (members) shall endeavor through investigation and conference to develop professional standards in social work" (Pumphrey and Pumphrey, ed., 1961:307). The AASW developed as a companion organization to the NCSW which had existed since 1873. Both NCSW and AASW provided impetus during the '20s for social work to develop standards of education and practice that would have a broad national focus, as well as the already noted professional stand.

During this period, a struggle between generic and specific casework developed that was not mere intellectual play.<sup>4</sup> If Flexner's challenge to social work was to be met, this potential splintering had direct bearing on the task: in order to be professional by the Flexnerian attribute model, commonality of function was essential and this diversity had to be bound together into a unified whole.

A special committee was appointed by NCSW in 1925 to study the issue of generic practice with the goal of bringing clarification and unification to the increasing diversity in social work. The committee, known as the Milford Conference, met for three years and approved a final report in November 1928 and published it in 1929.

The Milford Conference report emphasized that casework was at the core of the developing social work occupation. The Milford Conference position did not stem the tide of specialist association formation but it represented a symbolic statement asserting that casework was the base for future professional development regardless of the particular or specialized practice setting.

Where Richmond's book had been a ground-breaking definition and explication of a new activity, the Milford Conference report reflected a developmental statement building on the established past and striving to point a future direction. With these and other events, by 1929 social work had acquired many of the basic ingredients for professional

legitimacy called for in the Flexner attribute perspective.<sup>5</sup> Paralleling these practice developments was the debate over how best to educate, train, and socialize the new professional worker. The opposing sides of the debate fell into two broad categories: Agency-based versus University-based preparation. The means of education/training and therefore incorporation into the professional "select" was the pivotal area by which social work established its understanding of professional. The emergence of casework and the emphasis on its scientific/academic enhancement shaped the ultimate graduate-only professional education policy adopted by social work.

### The Institutionalization of the Scientific Base and Technique: The Graduate-Only Ethos Develops

In 1919 the Association of Training Schools for Professional Social Work (ATSPSW) was established to address professional training/education issues. ATSPSW was the forerunner of the American Association of Schools of Social Work (AASSW). Between 1920 to 1923, James H. Tufts, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Chicago completed the first study of social work education and training with support from the Russell Sage Foundation. Tuft's study (1923) first analyzed existing social work practice and inferred from this the characteristics of social work in general. Based on these characteristics, Tufts examined social work education and training as it existed and offered recommendations for future developments. A contemporaneous questionnaire study was conducted by Paul Beisser (1923). The results were published under the title "A Measurement of Professional Training: Deductions from a Questionnaire Study of Social Work Positions."<sup>6</sup> The Beisser results were presented in December 1922 to a joint meeting of the American Sociological Society and the ATSPSW. Beisser's study according to the *Encyclopedia of Social Work* (Boehm, 1977) influenced social work educational thinking while Tuft's was



seemingly ignored. Beisser's study recommended "that social work (education) be considered a professional school, provided it met certain requirements of autonomy within the university" (Boehm, 1977:301).

Throughout the 1920s support grew for the establishment of educational standards and practices that would maintain the perceived momentum toward professional maturity. Consistent with Biesser, the principle of university affiliation was firmly in place by the end of the decade. Advocates for agency-based training were unsuccessful in asserting their views. The professional ideal sought by social work leadership of the time characterized agency-based preparation as apprenticeship/vocational and therefore antithetical to the notion of professionalization (Blostein, 1977). This same view would reappear later as an objection to efforts promoting undergraduate social work education.

In May of 1927, Edith Abbott of the University of Chicago delivered an address to the annual meeting of the AASSW titled "Backgrounds and Foregrounds in Education for Social Work." Abbott's comments implied a maximum definition for professional education:

Is it true that we have or should have any such thing as a group of "routine caseworkers," and second, is it desirable that two grades of social workers should be trained—those who are to be constructive leaders in the field and those who are to be merely routine technicians of some sort? (Abbott, 1942:36).

In the same speech, Abbott correctly asserted the fundamental role of training/education in the formation of a social work profession and its boundary function:

. . . in the final analysis it is clear that social work will never be a profession and that social agencies can never be standardized except through professional schools. Not until some course of professional study is required as a prerequisite for entrance (*sic*) can it be said that social work is really a profession (Abbott, 1942:40).

One year later Abbott's definition, supporting a singular graduate-only definition, was explicitly stated in a paper entitled, "Some Basic Principles in Professional Education for Social Work";

. . . our profession calls for character as well as education . . . character is frequently, if not usually, a plant of slow growth and can be developed in a proper educational atmosphere better than anywhere else. That is one reason for our stress on the development of graduate rather than undergraduate schools; the undergraduates are not yet prepared, even with careful supervision, to understand and carry the heavy responsibilities which our profession lays on its members (Abbott, 1942:47).

Abbott spoke for a dominant sentiment held by social work education leaders of the time, that is, asserting a developmental argument that combined with the view that any preparation other than university and post-graduate was viewed as occupational, technical and thus non-professional. Even with the growing graduate-only ethos, undergraduate advocates were many and vocal during the 1920s (Hagerty, 1942). The baccalaureate advocates were not anti-graduate, but viewed undergraduate preparation as appropriate for professional entry-level, and a relevant foundation for further graduate and specialized education/training.

Numerous dynamics during the 1920s supported the momentum for the graduate-only definition articulated by someone like Abbott. In addition to the "developmental" argument, there was the apparent presumption, with medicine as the model, that the advanced nature of graduate study (with a liberal arts base) was, *a priori* more professional. A third issue promoting the post-baccalaureate model was the genuine educational dilemma of incorporating the practical field-work component into the traditional academic liberal arts undergraduate model. By defining social work education as post-baccalaureate, this fundamental educational problem was avoided.<sup>8</sup>

In the same year as Abbott's speech, a book by Sydnor Walker, *Social Work and the Training of Social Workers* (1928) was published. Originally written as a Columbia University Ph.D. dissertation in Political Science, this "outsider's" analysis of the social work field provided comparative thoughts to those asserted by leaders such as Abbott:

Underlying most of the discussion which takes place as to what educational preparation is desirable . . . is the assumption that all persons entering (social work) need the same general type of training. The schools of social work often state explicitly that they seek to prepare students of first-rate calibre for positions of leadership. But if preparation of social work is eventually to be a necessity for all entering the field, it may be well to raise the question whether preparation is to be the same for everyone (Walker, 1928:158).

Walker followed her hypothesis with an analysis of the occupation and the implications for education and training:

In reading much that is written one might suppose that all occupational divisions in this field were vertical rather than horizontal. The suggestion is offered that social work may be comprised of many "planes," calling for . . . varied and definite grades of preparation . . . for the preliminary interviewer in a welfare agency requires some background, but not that of the man who runs a community chest . . . in view of the practical demands of the field, preparation . . . will range from specialization in vocational courses given in the undergraduate liberal arts college to a graduate course of several years in a professional school (Walker, 1928:159).

Walker's discussion and analysis was relevant and accurate. Her conclusions rested upon extensive data collected from the 35 schools of social work that existed in 1927-28. While Abbott can be appreciated for high standards, there was nothing asserted by Walker and others to challenge the establishment and maintenance of high standards, nor the diminution of effort toward professionalization.

Against this backdrop of debate, concrete developments

in social work education moved rapidly after 1930. By 1932 a minimum curriculum had been articulated. In 1935, AASSW ruled that only schools of social work affiliated with Association of American Universities (AAU) membership colleges and universities would receive formal accreditation. By the end of the decade, the two year post-baccalaureate Masters degree was adopted as the only recognized professional credential.<sup>9</sup> Thus, when social work initially institutionalized control and monopoly, exemplified by the 1937 graduate-only action, it adopted a single advanced degree as both entry-level as well as the terminal professional practice degree. This action was the culmination of the attribute approach.

The graduate-only policy was taken in spite of evidence, like Walker's, that social work had numerous levels of operation ranging from minimum entry to more advanced specialized practice. But, throughout the 1930s in the context of the Depression and the growing public welfare sector, leadership moved social work toward the incorporation of a professional model that, in effect, defined as non-professional the fastest growing number of occupational roles available to it as an existing occupation and an aspiring profession. The 1937 action incorporated an emerging and significant contradiction: the majority-to-be of functioning social workers, in public welfare, were non-professional by the "profession's" own official definition (Hollis and Taylor, 1951:89-97). In effect, what social work accomplished with the 1937 graduate-only decision was a severing of its head from its supporting and still developing body. The status of graduate education had been asserted by the graduate-only policy, but the status was attached to the education level only and not to the content of social work activity, nor to a realistic assessment of the public welfare occupation/job market. Additionally, the presumed status accrued to an increasing minority of those who were, in fact, involved in social work.

Reviewing the burgeoning social work personnel needs beginning with the Federal Emergency Relief Administration

(FERA), Josephine C. Brown (1940) characterized the situation thusly,

. . . as a rule the local staffs in the smaller places, especially in the rural counties, were necessarily made up of people who were not social workers at all . . . Many of these people who were employed by local agencies as investigators, and often as supervisors, had had their training and experience in other professions and allied fields . . . the social service staffs, then, especially in the smaller places, came to be made up largely of local people who were not social workers by virtue of any previous training or experience and were called social workers or case workers merely because they had been employed to discharge a social work function in the Emergency Relief Administration (1940:277-279).

### The Undergraduate Advocates

During the 1940s the National Association of Schools of Social Administration (NASSA) was organized to promote and support undergraduate social work education. NASSA, formed in 1942, was an organization that “. . . identified with the tradition that tax-supported institutions have a responsibility for professional and quasi-professional personnel” (Hollis/Taylor, 1951:37).

An articulate and forceful spokesman from the NASSA ranks was Professor Mattie Cal Maxted of the University of Arkansas. Maxted, echoing Walker, strongly asserted a role for various levels of social work professional training and education. She spoke to the AASSW in January of 1945 on the topic of “The Need for Undergraduate Trained Social Workers in Arkansas” and her theme was that by embracing undergraduate social work preparation as an integral part of professional preparation then social work in the broadest sense would benefit:

The facts are that we may have thought of training for social workers as graduate training, but the greatest percentage of our social workers have had little or no training and for them any training even though undergraduate is an advance (Maxted, 1945:1).

NASSA's theme was consistently one of wanting to strengthen social work, particularly its practice, and therefore its standing and recognition. Maxted again: "The profession of social work has had difficulty not from those who have a little training but from those who have no training and who do not know that any is necessary" (Maxted, 1945:5-6).

The NASSA message was not accepted by social work leaders. Rather than acknowledging the substantive point, the graduate-only status-bias ethos directed the energies of AASSW toward co-opting NASSA. The efforts were effective. With the subsequent formation of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the graduate-only advocates managed to neutralize the undergraduate advocates of NASSA. In 1952 NASSA disbanded and was absorbed into the newly formed CSWE.

Maxted in her straightforward style, both observed and prophesied at the final NASSA conference in 1952 that,

... thus it is the untrained ones who are molding public opinion as to the nature of social work, and the attitudes toward the profession are in danger of becoming crystalized in the public mind by the standards set by these unprepared workers (Maxted, 1952:5-6).

Not until the mid-1960s did social work begin to rectify its mistaken attribute professional development by seriously contemplating an undergraduate professional degree. Even at that time the critical motivation for change came more from quarters external to social work rather than from within the field itself. Factors significant to this process were an overall increase in federal funding for professional education, the Social Security Amendments of 1962 strengthening the service role in public welfare, and the publication of the H E W report *Closing the Gap in Social Work Manpower* (Daly, 1965).

### The Consequences

Ty 1950, statistical profiles (see Hollis and Taylor, 1951) confirmed the large and growing gap between those social

workers defined by academic credential as professional and those defined as non-professional. A telling confirmation of social work's mistaken professional direction was provided by the public's perception of the field, particularly since public sanction was a fundamental theme of the attribute professional models. The dimensions of the flawed professional process were unwittingly reported in the widely utilized Wilensky and Lebeaux text *Industrial Society and Social Welfare* (1965). First published in 1958, and used in schools of social work into the mid-1970s, their chapter, "Emergence of a Social Work Profession," reported results of national surveys conducted in 1947 and 1953 to rank the social status of social work (Wilensky and Lebeaux, 1965:309–312).

Wilensky and Lebeaux report that social work, or variations thereof, tended to rank in the mid-range of occupational status. The Wilensky and Lebeaux discussion assumes social work to be a profession; even though, in at least one of the reported studies, the occupational category listed ("welfare worker for a city") probably did not require a Masters (i.e., "professional") degree. Reflecting the attribute status bias, they conclude that the "problem" of social work's unrealized public and professional acceptance would be solved "... as the educational level of the average social worker rises" (1965:312). Rather than understanding and acknowledging the urgent and cogent pleas of Maxted and others, the thinking exemplified by their analysis reinforced the schism between professional and non-professional.<sup>10</sup> Wilensky and Lebeaux reflected and reinforced the mistaken professional analysis followed by social work that actually neutralized the professional goal while seeming to promote it.

Further, in regard to the power of the attribute/ideal dogma passed down from 1915, Wilensky and Lebeaux in the same chapter made an interesting assertion:

Figures on the number of professionally trained workers greatly underestimate the *true growth of professional consciousness*, and public recognition of the profession in recent years.

The evidence is that *many more people identify themselves as social workers than graduate from schools of social work*, and many more positions calling for trained social workers exist than there are trained people to fill them (1965:309), author's emphasis).

Taken to its logical conclusion their statement provides affirmation of how little social work had understood the very end of professionalism, particularly control and power over the occupational arena.

For example, imagine someone, anyone, simply declaring that they were "feeling" and "thinking" themselves to be more professional today ("professional consciousness") and on this basis asserting both the right and authority to practice accordingly. No established profession would abide such a declaration as a claim to authority. No client, patient, or consumer would accept such a claim. Yet, forty-three years after Flexner's address, a major social work history/policy text was making just such a claim. The fantasy nature of the Wilensky and Lebeaux statement serves as a marker of how far afield and misguided social work's ideology had been, and the powerful hold of the status attribute ideology.

## Conclusion

Lubove has observed that, "the monopoly of a special skill is the essence of any occupational groups' claim to professional status. But expertise alone fails to distinguish a profession in the public eye . . ." (1965:117). Social work ignored the "monopoly" aspect in Lubove's statement and concentrated on the "special skill," and the result was the emergence of casework as the central skill/technology. Related to this key practice development was the educational policy adopted in 1937 defining the master's degree as the only recognized professional credential.

The 1974 incorporation of a baccalaureate level of professional entry represented a major step toward unifying the social work occupation and promoting effective professional control for itself. Even so, this legitimate action continues to



be met with resistance and ambivalent comment from established sources inside social work (see Specht et.al., 1984; Constable, 1984).<sup>11</sup>

Adding to social work's on-going internal struggle is the current social/political mood in the United States. With a history of flawed occupational and professional development, social work finds itself vulnerable to the assault underway against the broad range of human services. If a realistic understanding of the professional dynamic had been held fifty or sixty years ago, then potentially social work and social workers could have played then and now a more central and consistent role in the development of welfare policy. Instead, social work's energies have been dissipated in a mistaken search for status. By not defining into its notion of professional a realistic and functional entry-level certification representing fundamental control, social work secured for itself a future as a divided occupational group.

## NOTES

1. The C.S.W.E. end-point is important since it represented the first amalgamation of social work education.
2. Howe presumes the attribute/ideal model of professional in its finished form and then discusses social work's historical ambivalence and difficulty with the model. Both Howe and Specht et.al., though addressing quite different issues, by overlooking the fact that social work has never staked out an effective occupational boundary claim and sharing an *a priori* position regarding the meaning of profession, discuss potentially relevant issues in generally irrelevant terms.
3. The attribute model presented by Flexner in 1915 can be summarized by six key points: (1) intellectual operations, (2) scientific learning base, (3) practical and definite ends, (4) educationally communicable technique, (5) self-organization, and (6) altruistic motivation. Also, see Thoren (1972) footnote on p. 46 for a listing of many of the primary attribute citations.
4. Hospital social workers had an association dating from 1918 followed by the American Association of Visiting Teachers (1919), the Section of Psychiatric Social Workers of the American Association of Hospital Social Workers emerged in 1922 and developed into the American Association of Psychiatric Social Workers in 1926.

5. A system of associations and journals was well-established and the national census underway in 1929 classified social workers as "professional" (Leighninger, 1980).
6. The Beisser study is cited in Vol. I of *The Encyclopedia of Social Work* (1977), but the author has been unable to locate the actual published report.
7. Chapter 7 in Hagerty's book is titled "Graduate or Undergraduate Schools of Social Work?" He opens the chapter with the following comment: "I feel it would be absurd to discuss the above question were it not for the fact that writers chiefly from so-called graduate schools of social work have seriously questioned the advisability of giving training in social work to undergraduates" (1921:79). Later, in the same chapter, "Are the so-called graduate schools offering real graduate work? I have used the expression 'so-called' advisedly. There is a great distinction between giving graduate work and giving work to students who have graduated" (1931:84).
8. Hagerty discusses this issue and it surfaces in other discussions of the time. The scope of this paper does not allow for a full treatment except to observe that one thinks the issue was consistently side-stepped rather than confronted.
9. In 1937, the AASSW adopted the position that "all professional education for social work was to be offered as graduate study after October 1, 1939" (Hollis and Taylor, 1951:29).
10. Wilensky and Lebeaux's discussion is interesting in hindsight. They inform their reader in a footnote on page 312 that, "The National Association of Social Workers has recently (1956) declared it 'strongly opposes vocationally oriented undergraduate programs' of social work programs."
11. Constable's discussion of the "new" educational challenge facing social work is interesting, when set against earlier commentators like Tufts (1923), Walker (1925), Hagerty (1931), and Maxted (1952).

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## BOOK REVIEW

Trattner, Walter I., editor. *Biographical Dictionary of Social Welfare in America*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1986. xiv + 898 pp. \$75.00.

To the genre of reference books in which one can find brief biographies of leaders of various professions, ethnic or religious groups, or geographical areas, there has now been added this fine volume honoring men and women who have contributed to the development of social welfare in America. The *Biographical Dictionary of Social Welfare in America* (BDSWA) includes articles on 321 persons who were judged to have achieved eminence in their efforts "to improve communities or promote the financial, physical, and emotional well-being of individuals or groups that needed such assistance" in America from colonial times to the recent past. It does not include living persons, people known primarily for their work as elected public officials, philanthropists, or those who were primarily abolitionists, feminists, labor union leaders, or "intellectuals." "The emphasis, then, was on including people who were doers (or thinkers and doers), not solely thinkers, however important their ideas (and writings) may have been, and not mainly givers, however important their financial contributions may have been" (pp. xi, xii).

Among the persons included under these guidelines are one hundred and eighty-nine men and one hundred and thirty-two women. Seventeen were born before 1800, 120 hundred and ninety-four in the 19th century (1801-1900), and ten after 1900. Since one hundred and fifty-five were born after 1870, it seems fair to conclude that at least this many did most of their work in the 20th century. Even though living persons are not included, there is a strong emphasis on events of the present century.

The usefulness of the BDSWA may be suggested by comparing it with the *Dictionary of American Biography*. The DAB, consisting of twenty original volumes and seven supplement volumes, is not the largest general collection of

American biographies, but it is usually considered the most scholarly work of this type. Both DAB and BDSWA exclude living persons; the DAB, unlike the BDSWA, does not publish biographies until at least fifteen years after the subject's death. It follows that the BDSWA subjects may be divided into three groups: (1) those covered in both the BDSWA and the DBA, (2) those not covered in the DAB because their lives extended past the cutoff date (1965) for the most recent supplement volume, and (3) those not included in the DAB even though they did not live beyond 1965.

The first group made up of one hundred and sixty-one persons, includes such well known figures as Benjamin Franklin, Dorothea Dix, Jane Addams, and Eleanor Roosevelt, such relatively unknown persons as Thomas Eddy, Alice C. Fletcher, and Lillie M. Peck, and many in between. Persons who were active in several fields are usually given fuller coverage in the DAB, while the BDSWA concentrates on their work in the area of social welfare. For people who are notable primarily because of their work in their field, articles in the two reference works are usually quite comparable, though they are frequently different enough to make it worthwhile to consult both references.

The sixty-four subjects in the second group, who died during the years 1966–1984, include Saul Alinsky, Roger Baldwin, John Collier, Dorothy Day, Helen Keller, Martin Luther King, Jr., Abraham Muste, Margaret Sanger, Whitney Young, and many others. Biographies of some, but not all, of these persons will undoubtedly be included in later supplement volumes of the DAB, but they are not presently available.

The third group of BDSWA subjects were not included in the DAB for reasons other than chronological ineligibility. These 96 persons include Kate Barnard, Albert Deutsch, Molly Dewson, Josephine Dodge, Charles Eastman, Josephine and Pauline Goldmark, Mary Jarrett, Henry Moskowitz, Mary Ovington, Ellen Starr, Ida Wells-Barnett, and seven dozen others. It is here that the BDSWA clearly goes

beyond the DAB and other reference works in developing its special field.

On the whole, the BDSWA stands up well in comparison with the prestigious and much larger DAB. Its articles, researched and written by one hundred and eighty-eight different people who had to deal with widely differing collections of source material, naturally vary somewhat in quality, but they are all well written. Most are from two to four pages in length, and are based on primary sources where such material was available. Each includes a bibliography, generally identifying the major writings of the subject, other available primary sources, and the most useful books and articles about the subject.

The book includes a brief (three page) chronology of significant events in the history of American social welfare, 1601–1982, a listing of the three hundred and twenty-one subjects by year of birth (from Cotton Mather in 1663 to George A. Wiley in 1931), a listing of the subjects by place of birth (35 states, 24 countries) identification of the authors of the articles, and a reasonably full index.

The BDSWA is a solid scholarly work. It should be available to all students and professionals who might want to obtain information about individuals who made significant contributions to the development of social welfare in America.

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## NEW BOOKS RECEIVED

Ronald B. Flowers. *Children and Criminality: The Child as Victim and Perpetrator*, Westport, CT. Greenwood, 223 pp. \$35.00 cloth.

An historical and sociological analysis of child abuse, its explanations and consequences for the individual and society.

Steven Wisotsky. *Breaking the Impasse in the War on Drugs*, Westport, CT. Greenwood, 279 pp. \$35.00 cloth.

A critical assessment of current policy on drugs and its secondary effects upon political and social structure. Some ideas for basic policy change.

Charles H. Shireman. *Rehabilitating Juvenile Justice*. New York, Columbia, 188 pp. \$25.00 cloth.

A history of America's Juvenile Justice System, its philosophy and methodology.

Waldo K. Fishman and George Borello. *Readings in Humanist Sociology*. Bayside, N.Y., General Hall, 232 pp. \$13.95 paper; \$28.95 cloth. A anthology of ten essays with an introduction by Alfred McClung Lee.

Discussion of organizations, life cycle, social policy, research methodology, among others.

Frank Lindenfeld. *Radical Perspectives on Social Problems*. Readings in Critical Sociology, Third edition, Bayside, N.Y., General Hall, 404 pp. \$16.95 paper; \$29.95 cloth.

A selection of classic and contemporary essays in radical sociological thought, including Illich, Kropotkin, Bookchin, Domhoff, Marable, among others. Short introductions by the editor.

Joseph R. Peden and Fred R. Glahe. *The American Family and the State*. San Francisco, Pacific Research Institute, 482 pp. \$14.95 paper; \$34.95 cloth.

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