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# INTRODUCTION

## The Legacy of African-American Leadership In Social Welfare

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The legacy of African-American leadership in social welfare history is only recently finding space in social work literature. The small number of professional journals in social work that publish historical articles, along with institutionalized resistance to the acknowledgement of African-Americans contributions to the development of the profession, have contributed to this dearth of scholarship. The results have been that many professionals are disinclined to perceive of African-Americans as resourceful, skilled and powerful. Instead, the theme of pathology permeates social work literature, teaching, and ultimately social work practice. The social work profession emphasizes the importance of diversity, yet fails to acknowledge the National Urban League (NUL) as a major social welfare movement comparable in influence and impact to the Charity Organization Society and the settlement house movements. We embrace the importance of social justice and empowerment, while failing to acknowledge the pioneering social activism of individuals like Ida B. Well-Barnett as an integrated part of social work/welfare history.

A handful of scholars have made a commitment to lead the charge to correct social work history by presenting a more accurate, truthful and inclusive picture of social welfare history. It is out of such a commitment that this volume was born. For some historical researchers, this work is merely an intellectual curiosity, but for others, it is a personal and professional mandate. Whether mandate or intellectual exercise, the contributors to this issue have meticulously researched primary data to expand and enlarge the legacy of African-American leadership in social welfare history. With careful attention to detail and

historical accuracy, these authors have, in the research process, reinforced and supported each others' findings and conclusions.

The articles in this issue are bound together by a common research method, by the element of cross-fertilization, and by the scholarship that each writer brings to her/his work. Furthermore, these writers provide information, both analytical and descriptive, which is designed to inform both attitudes and practice. Several of these writers have used the edited topical life history method to explore the unshakable convictions of African-American social work pioneers in their quest to establish social work services and to train African-American social workers. This historical method lends itself to documenting the evolution of social work/welfare through the experiences and definitions held by one person, one group, or one organization as that person, group, or organization interprets those experiences (Denzin, 1970). The strength of these pioneers' convictions, gave them the tenacity to continue their work in spite of the institutionalized forces that militated against their success. Beginning with little more than intellectual will and veracity, the pioneers discussed in this volume found the resources and human capital needed to establish and provide social welfare services, to train social workers via institutes and formal schools, to travail as feminists, abolitionists, and/or orators, to struggle and strategize against social injustices and to implement programs for social change.

The first article by *Laura B. Somerville* examines Sojourner Truth's life as a abolitionist and feminist through a review of dictated narratives. The author suggests that Truth's life provides a model for advocacy which is yet unrivaled in social work. She laments the difficulty of reviewing the life history of someone who was illiterate and left little written documentation while cautioning us against excluding such a prominent players in U.S. history. Using the chattel slavery system and the legal status of women at that time as a backdrop, the writer reviews speeches and narratives to highlight Sojourner Truth's philosophy and her movement from itinerant preacher to political activist. She surmises that social work has many lessons to learn from a review of the life and works of Truth who epitomized the social change agent then and now.

*Audrey E. Johnson* writes about a pioneer African-American social worker and activist, William Still. Johnson's article contains a critical, historical analysis of social work/welfare services and activities, and is one of only a handful of such analyses which focuses on antebellum social welfare work for and by African-Americans. According to this essay, Still devoted his life to improving the conditions of the African-American community as well as the wider society. Skilled in casework, group work and community organization, Still maintained meticulous records about fugitive slaves who passed through his office on their way to freedom. As secretary of the Anti-Slavery office in Philadelphia, Still engaged in case finding, policy development, case management, and political agitation in his quest to protect the rights of African-Americans both enslaved and freed. With the help of his oldest daughter, Dr. Caroline Still, William Still wrote of his social work activities in *THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD* which sold 10,000 copies. The author concludes that William Still's human legacy of social work and social welfare services is unparalleled.

*Iris Carlton-LaNey's* article discusses Dr. George Edmund Haynes' role in training African-American social workers through the NUL Fellowship Program. This program provided opportunities for African-Americans to study at many of the pioneer schools of social work including the New York School of Philanthropy and the Atlanta School of Social Work. The author details the development and process of the fellowship program including mechanisms for selecting students and Haynes' role in soliciting the cooperation of leading social work educators of the times. The rigorous testing procedure which potential fellows underwent included a trial and observation period in the field, either in New York or Nashville, which was used to insure that applicants had the aptitude, stamina and determination needed to become effective social workers. As part of its mission, the fellowship program spread an appreciation for scholarship and training in the field of social work. The NUL fellows went on to make their mark in the developing field of social work and to raise the standards of both social work personnel and programs within the African-American community and the larger society.

*N. Yolanda Burwell* presents an edited topical life history of Lawrence A. Oxley concentrating on his role in training African-American social workers. Oxley established the North Carolina Public Welfare Institutes as a vehicle for staff development and training of African-American public welfare workers. The training institutes span a twenty-year period from 1926 through 1946. These institutes provided competency-based instruction on topics ranging from the role of community resources in preventing juvenile delinquency to record keeping in child welfare. The training institutes rotated sites among the African-American colleges throughout the state, finally settling at the Bishop Tuttle Memorial Training School of Social Work at St. Augustine College in Raleigh. While Jim Crow laws made traveling to the institutes and finding suitable housing a challenge at best, the number of participants continued to grow from 50 in 1926 to a total of over 700 by 1934. For Oxley, organizing the institutes was a major undertaking requiring careful planning, negotiation, and coordination. The author concludes that social work training via the North Carolina Public Welfare Institutes for Negroes filled an educational void for African-American social workers in the South.

*Robenia Baker Gary* and *Lawrence E. Gary* use a descriptive historical analysis to present information on the education and training of African American social workers between 1900 and 1930. Reviewing the societal forces that helped to create conditions of human suffering and that dictated tremendous levels of need, Gary and Gary document the training of the African-American social worker through four basic approaches including: (1) apprenticeship, (2) institutes and special courses, (3) undergraduate sociology and social science courses, and (4) schools of social work. The authors give primary attention to the establishment of two schools of social work for African-Americans in the South: the Atlanta School of Social Work and the Bishop Tuttle School in North Carolina. A comparative analysis revealed that the Atlanta School emphasized research while the Bishop Tuttle School concentrated on home management, club work and religious courses. Arguments around professional standards were prevalent as these two schools struggled to attract faculty and students and to develop a relevant

course of study. While the authors' work offers preliminary insights into professional social work training in the South, they acknowledge the need for further research to determine the schools' theoretical emphases, to define their primary research agendas, and to identify their early graduates, their accomplishments and contributions.

*Tawana Ford Sabbath* discusses two social service organizations in Philadelphia during the Progressive Era, the Armstrong Association of Philadelphia and the Women's Christian Alliance (WCA). The Armstrong Association engaged primarily in activities to place migrating African-American skilled laborers in suitable work settings. It also identified with the developing field of social work and served as a practicum setting for social work and sociology students in the area. Like the Armstrong Association, the WCA also started in response to the needs of newly urbanized African-Americans. Responding initially to the needs of African-American women who came North, the WCA soon became a major force in fostering care / child placement for Philadelphia. The author presents a clear picture of the WCA's works even with the limitations caused by a paucity of consistent primary data. Several pioneer social workers are discussed including Forrester B. Washington, a prominent NUL fellow and social work educator. Finally, the author argues for more research to firmly entrench these organizations in social work / welfare history.

*Susan Kerr Chandler's* essay is a poignant analysis of the Young Men's Christian Association's (YMCA) early treatment of African-Americans and of its adherence to a strict color line. Chandler presents us with the paradox of an organization that based its existence on the tenets of Christian love and brotherhood, yet simultaneously used cajolery, manipulation, money, and even threats of bodily harm to establish and maintain strict segregation of the races. The Colored Men's Department, established by the International YMCA by 1875, enabled the organization to avoid the issue of integrated services for many years. The author notes that two important forces compelled the YMCA to begin to deal with its segregationist policies. The two forces to which Chandler refers were the Great Migration which brought thousands of southern African-Americans

to northern urban centers and the "great benefaction", which brought funding to build Colored Ys through the philanthropy of Julius Rosenwald. The practice of segregated Ys, based solely on skin color, quickly became an institutionalized policy after 1910 and remained intact until 1946.

*Aminifu R. Harvey* presents a descriptive historical analysis of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA & ACL) between 1917 and 1940. Discussing the UNIA & ACL as a model for Black community development, Harvey describes the services, programs, training and discipline which were inherent in the growth and germane to the development of this organization. He also discusses the tenets manifested in the philosophy and mission of the organization. The article cites and highlights some of the various sub-groups within the organization, e.g. the Universal African Black Cross Nurses which functioned as a social service/welfare arm of the organization providing an array of professional services. Under the charismatic leadership of Marcus Garvey, the UNIA & ACL boosted four million active members from its beginning in 1917 to 1921. Contrary to popular belief, the UNIA & ACL attracted membership from the African-American intelligentsia as well as from the unlettered Black community world-wide. Finally, caught in a web of alleged deceit, sabotage and chicanery, the UNIA & ACL began to decline after 1940. Harvey suggests that this organization, nonetheless, provides a model for community development and solidarity for all people of African ancestry.

Utilizing social movement theory, *Linda S. Moore* presents the argument that interorganizational linkages were necessary to support the social movement which eventually culminated in the establishment of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). These linkages, providing both human and monetary resources, brought awareness and organization to the movement. Settlement house workers along with journalists, clergy, and political leaders, both African-American and White, were identified as playing central roles in the movement. *THE CALL*, issued on Lincoln's birthday and signed by 53 people, initiated the coalition building which was a necessary ingredient for the success of the movement. The

author also discusses the difficulty inherent in coalition building and linkages when White racial superiority blocks effective communication and interaction. Essentially, Moore notes, the White liberals active in the social movement were disinclined to recognize that their African-American counterparts were their professional equals and had skills, knowledge, and networks critical to the success of the movement. The author concludes that similar issues of racial divisiveness impede successful social work practice today and must be overcome if effective and meaningful practice is to result.

In the concluding article, *Wilma Peebles-Wilkins* focuses on mechanisms for integrating content on African-Americans into the social work curriculum as well as on the broader issue of diversity which is prominent in discussions of social work education. A unified approach to integrating content on African-Americans onto course content is advocated as the most effective way to help students learn and "accept" the information as a significant part of social work/welfare historical development. The author provides examples of unifying concepts, teaching aids, and a brief selected reading list. The author further suggests that the direct involvement of the faculty person in historical research is invaluable. Such involvement strengthens the course by providing primary data which help to validate the teaching process.

Collectively, the authors in this special issue provide information that encourages social workers to understand, accept, and appreciate the legacy of African-American leadership in social welfare history. Furthermore, they ask that the reader use this content as a model for social change and as a springboard for further research.

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