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North Carolina Public Welfare Institutes for Negroes 1926–1946

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Black welfare workers in the South had limited opportunities for professional social work education and development. In 1926, annual public welfare institutes for Blacks were sponsored by the North Carolina State Board of Charities and Public Welfare through its Division of Work Among Negroes. They filled a critical educational and professional void. For twenty years, these annual institutes bolstered the knowledge and skills of a growing corp of Black welfare workers and the maturation of the profession in North Carolina.

The paucity of professionally trained workers was troubling to social welfare leaders of both races in the early decades of the twentieth century. Finding trained Black welfare workers was especially difficult as agencies and organizations tried to deal with the many social problems Black city dwellers and rural residents faced (Juvenile Protection Association, 1913). Jessie O. Thomas, field secretary of the Atlanta Urban League, called for the establishment of a southern training center for Blacks at the 1920 National Conference of Social Work to remedy this problem. As a result, Atlanta University School of Social Work was founded that year (Ross, 1978; Platt and Chandler, 1988; Rouse, 1983). Atlanta University faculty member, Helen Pendleton (1925) saw the need for trained Negro social workers in southern rural districts. She encouraged social work education be extended to Blacks so they could render more effective service to their own people and increase understanding between the races in the south.

Another Black social worker was vexed by the absence of Black welfare workers as he began to implement a new statewide public welfare program for Blacks. In 1924, Lt. Lawrence

A. Oxley was named to direct the Bureau of Work Among Negroes, a new unit of the North Carolina State Board of Charities and Public Welfare. Oxley believed Blacks helping each other was the most effective method of ameliorating desperate social conditions in the racially segregated state. Competent workers skilled in social work methods were needed to carry out his ambitious state-wide program of welfare work. Mrs. Hattie Russell of Charlotte, North Carolina was the only Black worker employed in a county department of public welfare when Oxley began his position (North Carolina State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1926, p. 108; Sanders, 1933).

One of the most difficult problems facing the Bureau has been that of securing trained Negro social workers. There is a growing demand for educated social workers in the South. This is part of the larger demand for the best leadership among Negroes in other fields (North Carolina State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1926, p. 110).

In 1926, Oxley began annual public welfare institutes to supplement training and staff development needs of Black workers. Oxley's initiative was pioneering, especially in reference to the development of Black social work professionals. The North Carolina Public Welfare Institutes for Negroes introduced evolving social work methods, knowledge and skills, national and state leaders and social welfare developments to Black welfare personnel until 1946. During this twenty year span, the institutes professionalized social work among southern Blacks who were cut off from most traditional avenues.

Using descriptive historical research approach, primary and secondary records were examined to ascertain the organization, delivery and impacts of the institutes during the Great Depression and years of World War II. Early leaders in social work education efforts are identified.

History of Social Work Education Among Blacks

Gary and Gary (1993) found little on the history of social work education and training for Blacks in the literature. (Editor's note: see next article) Blacks had limited opportunities for

social work training and education as compared to Caucasians in the 1920s. Southern schools of social work, like University of North Carolina, did not admit people of color. Northern schools accepted Blacks, but in limited numbers. Carlton-LaNey (1982, 1991) and Platt (1991) describe the matriculation of two Black men and one woman at the New York School of Social Work and Chicago School of Social Work during the Progressive Era. However, more social histories on the educational experiences of early social work pioneers are needed.

Lack of opportunity meant several alternatives materialized to insure professional training of Black welfare workers. Schools of social work were started to offset this problem. In addition to Atlanta University School of Social Work, the Bishop Tuttle Memorial Training School of Social Work was established by the Women's Auxilliary of Episcopal Church in 1925 at St. Augustine's College in Raleigh, North Carolina. Black women received two years of formal courses in social services and religious studies (Halliburton, 1937, p. 52-53). Unfortunately, the demand for trained social workers was greater than the two southern professional schools could accommodate.

A second alternative was training through agency auspices and investigative conferences (Pollard, 1983). Atlanta University, Hampton Institute and Tuskegee Institute held annual investigative conferences. Begun in the late 1890s, these popular education-based conferences promoted self-help, self-reliance, cooperative economics and race solidarity. Many social welfare initiatives and activities grew out of these national research conferences. Day care centers, insurance and mutual aid ventures and health and sanitation campaigns were started by Blacks after attendance to these forums. Participants gained knowledge in community education, research and social betterment attitudes, but not professional social work methods and skills.

Public welfare institutes became a third means for professional social work development. Working welfare workers were instructed in specific social work content and methodologies. Gary and Gary (1993) note public welfare institutes were a widely used, though controversial method for educating an emerging corp of social workers for both races. Excluded from

dominant state social work conferences and summer institutes, Blacks attended separate educational programs led by leading social work experts of both races. Special topics and short-term courses were offered. National service organizations held institutes for Black staff which ran two or three days or an entire summer term. For example, the Boy Scouts of America, local community chests, the American Association of Hospital Social Workers and the YWCA sponsored public welfare institutes for their Black staff.

One of the first welfare institutes for Black workers was held in Atlanta, Georgia in 1919. Lugenia Burns Hope, dynamic wife of the president of Atlanta University, organized a Social Services Institute at Morehouse College. Mrs. Hope presided over the board of the Neighborhood Union, a successful community welfare organization/center operated by Blacks and for Blacks in Atlanta. The Social Service Institute sought to enlighten neighborhood workers about health and sanitation and to encourage improvements in their respective neighborhoods. Its theme was "make the world safe for babies and children" (Rouse, 1983).

Ninety seven people attended a week of classes in home nursing, prevention and cure of tuberculosis, oral hygiene for mothers and infants, and proper detection and care of feeble-mindedness in children. Child nutrition and proper eye treatment were covered. Social work methods were presented on how to organize, how to approach people and how to strengthen the home and boys and girls clubs (Rouse, 1983; Neverdon-Morton, 1982).

That same year, the University of North Carolina in cooperation with the North Carolina State Board of Charities and Public Welfare and the American Red Cross held its first social service institute. This summer institute lasted five or six weeks and covered topics in rural sociology, family casework, rural economics, social problems, public health and juvenile delinquency (Public Welfare Courses, 1920; Sanders, 1941). These state institutes continued into the early 1950s with an average duration of two or three days. Segregation laws curtailed attendance by Blacks until the 1940s (North Carolina State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1940).

The concept of public welfare institutes had its detractors. E. Franklin Frazier, the first Director of Atlanta University's School of Social Work did not want welfare institutes to substitute for formal social work education (Gary and Gary, 1993).

Despite controversy, the public welfare institutes allowed Oxley and others to offer training and professional development to staff who were often the only Black worker in an agency or county. The institutes trained an emerging corp of welfare workers who had few opportunities for such training. They provided a measure of competency-based instruction as the south tried to meet its desperate demand for trained social workers. Popular among welfare workers from Virginia and the Carolinas, the North Carolina Public Welfare Institutes for Negroes enhanced the professionalization of social work among Black workers when schools of social work and research conferences could not.

The North Carolina Public Welfare Institute for Negroes

The North Carolina Public Welfare Institutes for Negroes attracted people from rural areas and a variety of welfare settings, including Black staff in the eight state agencies serving Black children and adults. Oxley sought to insure a continuous network of trained and competent Black social workers through the institutes.

The chief purpose of the institute was to give further training to those workers employed by county and city governments and to offer special lectures for officers and workers from any volunteer and private school agencies throughout the state (North Carolina State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1926, p. 110).

The Public Welfare Institutes for Negroes rotated among the state's Black colleges during its early years. After 1930 Bishop Tuttle Memorial Training School of Social Work became the main site. The state's capital city of Raleigh was centrally located and the state agencies were accessible. St. Augustine's College facilities could accommodate the large attendance. Institutes ran for three days in January, February or March, with an average attendance of 90.

State Department directors, local and national social work leaders of both races constituted the institute faculty. E. Franklin

Frazier spoke on the Black family at the first institute. Dr. Franklin O. Nichols of the American Social Hygiene Association discussed sex education at several institutes. T. Arnold Hill of the Urban League and Eugene Kinkle Jones of the U. S. Department of Commerce led sessions as well. Influential leaders like Charles Rose, President of the North Carolina Bar Association participated. Commissioners of the State Board of Charities and Public Welfare presided and Governors made a point to attend or send remarks (Says South Best Place for Negroes, 1926, p. 4). Such distinguished faculty signifies the level of importance the institutes held in the state as well as the expertise Black workers were exposed to.

Black welfare practitioners in county departments delivered papers and participated as faculty as well. For example, at the 17th annual institute Mrs. Jeannette Sills of Franklin County read a paper on the effects of receiving public assistance on family life and Annie D. Singfield of Anson County presented on the effects of receiving assistance on children (Sills, 1943; Singfield, 1943).

The institutes are composed of classes of problems of social welfare and methods of meeting them, and mass meetings at which special speakers present topics of interest (Fifth Annual Public Welfare Institute, 1934).

By design, nonconcurrent sessions ran 50 minutes. The Negro family, child welfare and delinquency, mental health, social casework and record-keeping were covered. The principles, methods and scope of social work was emphasized. Miss Lilly Mitchell, state director of the Division of Child Welfare spoke on social casework with individuals and/or families at each institute. Oxley taught principles and methods of community organizing as well as ways to finance county and city welfare programs for Black constituents (North Carolina State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1928, p. 107). During the New Deal Era, participants learned about national recovery, emergency relief, employment matters and farm credit as North Carolina grappled with limited resources and high social needs.

Specific content on Black social conditions, child welfare matters, work with rural families, improving accountability and

recordkeeping systems and juvenile delinquency became standard topics.

Each afternoon workers could consult with state division heads or national leaders about a local problem and received suggestions one-on-one or in small groups. These consultations were considered a helpful feature.

Participants overcame several barriers to attend. Travel accommodations were not the best. Jim Crow laws made travel by train uncomfortable. Depending upon the location, sometimes lodging was provided on campus; at other times, participants stayed in private homes. Southern hotels did not welcome Blacks; the few existing Black hotels could only accommodate a few. Meals were on site. Registration fees were \$1 in 1930 and \$.75 in 1934 (Ninth Annual Public Welfare Institute, 1934; Fifth Annual Public Welfare Institute, 1930).

Despite these impediments, attendance and the variety of welfare workers seeking professional training grew. At the first institute at Winston-Salem's Teacher's College in 1926, fifty people attended, 38 Blacks, two whites and 10 visitors. County and city welfare workers and YMCA and YWCA secretaries were represented. Jeanes supervisors, farm demonstration agents and church service workers came. Black staff with state institutions for Black defectives, delinquents and dependents also attended (*Much Interest in Workers' School, 1926, p.8*).

In a memo to Miss Lay dated February 28, 1928 and entitled "Notes on Negro Institutes," Oxley noted 83 people had registered for the first institute, 110 had registered for the second institute and 46 were preregistered for the institute next month.

The Jeanes Supervisor in Johnston County has sent a letter stating she is coming to the Institute, bringing with her the Chairman of the local Welfare Unit, the President of the Johnston County Parent-Teachers Association and the Principals of the Clayton, Piney Grove and Princeton public schools. (*Oxley to Lay, 1928*)

Ninety-six actually attended in 1928 (North Carolina State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1928, p. 107).

One hundred twenty-five people were present at the ninth institute, including staff with the local Civil Works Administration, Federal Emergency Relief Administration and the National

Reemployment Administration. By 1934 over 700 workers had benefitted from these institutes when Lt. Oxley left North Carolina to work with the Department of Labor.

The Sixteenth Annual Public Welfare Institute for Negroes had panel discussions on dependency, treatment of adult offenders and children's problems. Its theme was "What are Our Goals in Social Work?" Over 80 attenders heard the State Commissioner of Public Welfare explain the newest social legislation coming out of the Washington, D. C. and Raleigh (16th Annual Negro Institute Held at St. Augustine's, 1941, p. 1-2; North Carolina State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1942, p. 108).

The final institute included topics on community resources in preventing juvenile delinquency, keeping records in child welfare cases and case work recordings (20th Annual Public Welfare Institute for Negro Workers Held in February, 1946, p. 14).

The North Carolina Public Welfare Institutes for Negroes survived changes in state administrations, world war, economic depressions and new initiatives within the Bureau. As social work evolved as a profession, so did the institutes evolve. What began as general content matured into more specialized approaches to practice.

Conclusion

The Institute serves as a valuable agency in bringing the state's public welfare program to those whose interest is keenest; and in awakening widespread interest among an ever-growing group. Negro social workers find valuable help at the Institute for the faculty and speakers always include individuals prepared to make real contributions (Sixth Annual Public Welfare Institute, 1931).

The Public Welfare Institutes for Negroes trained a broad cross-section of working welfare workers about the scope, history and object of social work and the social conditions of Black life in the state. The desire for training was high among participants. Each year, ideas and methodologies were shared by some of the leading national professionals. Participants were privy to the latest developments as the profession matured. The institutes legitimized social work as a professional activity.

The public welfare institutes were a major undertaking for Oxley and an important component of the Bureau. They required advanced planning and coordination with leaders in the professional Black community and state administration. Interracial in nature, they were executed within the boundaries of the southern color line.

Participants benefitted in other ways from these institutes. Individually, Black workers were scattered across the state, sometimes the only professional Black in their county or agency. Once a year, they gathered to share experiences with each other. These state-wide meetings provided a means to temper the isolation and build collegial relationships. The special consultations with institute faculty gave workers specific help on problems from key decision-makers or experts in a field.

The institutes increased the credibility of hard working staff in diverse agencies engaged in welfare work. The institutes afforded Black workers an avenue to present professional papers and serve as faculty. Over time, Black workers gained increased presence in professional circles around the state. This was a high honor.

The public welfare institutes did not substitute for formal education in social work. In fact, Oxley and his successors, William R. Johnson and Dr. John Larkin supported pursuit of formal study at the New York School of Work, Atlanta University and the Bishop Tuttle Memorial Training School of Social Work for workers. Exposure to the institutes spurred many Black workers to pursue professional social work degrees.

Oxley was instrumental in identifying and steering many Black workers to positions within county departments of public welfare. If county superintendents were skeptical of their training or expertise, Oxley tied their employment to attendance to the institutes. This proviso was enough to encourage employment. Highly regarded, the institutes were designed to assist working persons who needed information and skills to perform their duties.

The history of social work education for Blacks is more than the establishment of schools for social work or participation in social work conferences. Public welfare institutes were significant to social work training and development because they

validated social work practice among workers excluded from the traditional avenues of professional affiliation and training. The Public Welfare Institutes for Negroes filled an educational void for Black social workers in North Carolina.

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