The Decline of the Public Intellectual in Social Work

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This article examines reasons for social work's abandonment of public discourse, activism and intellectual life. It also explores strategies to encourage the profession to reenter public life and develop a modern cadre of social work identified public intellectuals. Specifically, this process entails professional and academic reform and a renewed vision around the social justice mission of social work.

Key words: *public intellectuals, schools of social work, alienation, research methodology, social justice, social survey movement, social work history*

Nowadays, social workers have little influence on the pressing social issues of the day. Discussions around Social Security privatization, Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) reauthorization, Medicare reform, the health care crisis, poverty, and other social welfare-related issues are dominated by economists, political scientists, attorneys and professional policy analysts rather than social workers (Karger & Stoesz, 2002). Not surprisingly, even former president Clinton's welfare reform panel was headed by David Ellwood, Mary Jo Bane and Bruce Reed, none of whom were social workers or even identified with the profession.

In contrast to the early twentieth century, there is a marked absence of social commentators with the appellation "social worker." Indeed, there is little or no social work presence in public venues such as speaking tours, radio talk shows, television news shows, popular magazines, newspaper editorials, op-ed pages or

other mechanisms that inform the public about welfare and public policy issues. Not since Wilbur Cohen's tenure as an official of the Social Security Administration (1935–1956), and then as assistant secretary, undersecretary and finally Secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (1961–1969), has a social work-related official occupied a highly visible federal office. Although Cohen was often claimed by social work—perhaps because of a 4-year stint as a professor of public welfare administration at the University of Michigan—his degree was in economics. In fact, Cohen's last academic appointment was as dean of the School of Education at the University of Michigan (1969–1979) (Berkowitz & Cohen, 1995).

The Need for Social Work Identified Public Intellectuals

The need for social work identified public intellectuals is especially pressing at the present time. In particular, this results from a rapidly changing economy and profound changes in America's political and economic Zeitgeist. For instance, the United States was recently mired in an economic recession. The DOW Jones Industrial Average (DJIA) started 2000 at 11,357; by March 2003 it fell to 7,500, a drop of 34% (Dow Jones, 2003). Although the DJIA rose to almost 2000 levels by late 2003, it was not followed by a concomitant reduction in unemployment. Job creation was virtually stagnant since the recovery in 2002, and family income dropped. By late 2003 the unemployment rate was close to 6% (rising from 4% in 2000), and more realistically, closer to 8% if "missing" workers (the unemployed that gave up the job search) are added (Economic Policy Institute, 2004). The rise in unemployment has hit the poor hard, especially former recipients who have reached their TANF lifetime cap.

Economic problems were exacerbated as the federal budget went from a surplus of $122 billion in 1999 to a record deficit of more than $450 billion in 2003, a number expected to rise to more than $520 billion in 2004. This huge deficit translated into zero growth in governmental spending (a cut since social spending is negative unless it increases with population growth) and deep cuts in social welfare programs. State budget deficits intensified the economic crisis. In 2003, California posted a record deficit

of $38 billion (Governor's Budget Summary, 2003); Texas, $10–12 billion; and New York, $10 billion (Schumer, 2003). Concomitantly, while corporate profits and productivity grew since 2002, wages for those in the bottom 10 percent of the workforce declined by almost 15 percent from 1989 to 2003, and family income inequality rose by 22 percent from 1968 to 1994 (Weinberg, 2002; Karger, 2005). Only a few mainstream pundits have consistently commented about the effects of the skewed economy on the poor (Krugman, 2002).

Social work has historically relied on the Democratic party to promulgate a progressive social welfare agenda. However, by the 1980s most Democrats had discarded the liberal agenda—moving towards the right and often squarely into fiscal and social conservatism. Most of the current crop of Democrats, such as John Kerry, Howard Dean, Wesley Clark, John Edwards, Joseph Lieberman, and so forth, are neither strong defenders of the welfare state nor especially sensitive to the problems of the poor. The historic base of support for the welfare state has virtually disintegrated on both the state and national levels. Moreover, even liberal economists, such as Paul Krugman, only speak tangentially about welfare spending, and then limit their concerns to larger budgetary or other economic issues. The traditional Democratic party advocates for social welfare policy have either died, abandoned their posts, or have been relieved of their duty by the electorate.

David Stoesz (2003) argues that liberal non-affiliated public intellectuals may be a thing of the past. Indeed, conservatism has become the dominant force in public policy. One reason for this phenomenon is that conservatives have successfully dominated public venues through a network of solidly endowed think tanks, such as the Heritage Foundation, the Olin Foundation, the Hoover Institute and the Cato Institute (Morin & Dean, 1999; Gould, 2003; Rorty, 1998). While liberal think tanks exist, they lack the financing, organization, and political influence of the conservative think tanks. As a result, the liberal defense of the welfare state is weak, and for the past 30 years, social progressives have been in retreat from the conservative juggernaut. For example, most "talking head" television or radio programs are headed by conservatives, such as Robert Novak, Patrick Buchanan, Rush Limbaugh, William Buckley and John McLaughlin. While right-

wing pundits can be easily identified by most Americans who own a television set, the same is not true for leading progressive advocates—many of whom are women and people of color. Even when the "left" is represented for the sake of balance, it is usually by centrists such as Morton Kondracke, Fred Barnes, Michael Kinsley or Charles Krauthammer. The real American left is virtually absent from American talk shows. Three principal areas influence the dearth of public intellectuals in social work: (1) the institutional auspices under which social workers are employed; (2) rigid ideas about professionalism; and (3) the insularity of modern academic life.

Factors Mitigating Against the Emergence of Public Intellectuals in Social Work

Most social service institutions that employ social workers fail to encourage—or outrightly discourage—the public exposure of their employees around controversial issues. According to Michael Barth (2003), about 43% of social workers are employed in the private for- or non-profit service compared with 57% who work in the public sector. Whether in the private or public sector, the vast majority of social workers are in direct service areas that leave little time for public involvement. For instance, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) notes that professional social workers are the nation's largest group of mental health service providers. There are more clinically trained social workers—over 190,000 in 1998—than psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychiatric nurses combined (NASW, Fact Sheet, 2003). Severe understaffing at many social service agencies has resulted in long hours and high caseloads. Complaints about poor working conditions has been linked to some dramatic work stoppages in recent years, including a 1997 walk-out by child service workers in Los Angeles county (Rainey and Meyer, 1997). In fact, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) maintains that one of the major challenges to the profession is the deterioration of public sector employment standards. The decline in workplace standards in many private and public employment settings may partly explain why NASW members in private practice grew from 10.9% in 1982 to 19.7% in

1995 (Gibelman and Schervish, 1997). Overall, the kinds of jobs and the conditions that many social workers labor under do little to encourage the growth of public intellectuals.

Social service organizations exist within a political context and are sustained by federal funding and/or the largesse of philanthropists and the United Way. However, by the middle 1990s the political context grew more tenuous as the House of Representatives and the Senate became controlled by conservative Republicans. By 2003, Republicans controlled 29 governorships and 21 state legislatures (Democrats controlled 17) (National Governors Association, 2003; National Conference on State Legislatures, 2002). In the current climate, social welfare agencies are struggling to maintain their level of funding and are therefore reluctant to risk alienating right-wing politicians. The operative concept is caution, and social agencies are fearful of supporting the public involvement of employees that might further alienate inherently hostile political forces. Clearly, beleaguered social welfare agencies cannot be expected to endorse the controversies that lie at the heart of public discourse.

Professionalism and Public Intellectuals

The halcyon days of social work activism are long gone. Also gone is social work's formidable presence in public life. Social work-identified luminaries included Jane Addams, Mary van Kleeck, Grace and Edith Abbott, Frances Perkins, Harry Hopkins, Julia Lathrop, Lillian Wald and others. These reformers influenced far-ranging issues such as child labor laws, employment protection for women, labor unions, consumer protection, social security and even war and peace However, after the profession's initial burst of public visibility in the early 20th century, it slowly descended into a micro-practice orientation, leaving public policy to a new breed of non-social work-identified specialists.

Social work's adoption of micro practice and hyper-professionalism led to a form of anti- intellectualism, which manifested itself in several ways, including a partial withdrawal from its earlier social justice mission. For instance, a cursory examination of two leading social work education journals (*Journal of Social Work Education* and *Social Work Education*) showed that in 2001–2002 they published 167 articles; only 19 directly addressed

diversity and social justice. There were no articles on religious minorities (i.e., Christian fundamentalism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam). Given its continuing focus on the pathology of the individual and the family, the social work profession has drifted away from being in the vanguard of social justice (McDonald, Harris and Wintersteen, 2003). The refusal of social work education to address important social justice issues has, in turn, alienated much of the vulnerable client base that the profession professes to help. Current pressure to firm up a professional identity has also produced practitioners that function mainly as administrators and clinicians, while overlooking the historic role of advocate and public intellectual (McDonald, Harris and Wintersteen, 2003).

Exclusion, Professionalism, Anti-Intellectualism and
Public Intellectuals

NASW proudly touts the accomplishments of esteemed luminaries such as Jane Addams, Frances Perkins (Secretary of Labor under FDR), Whitney M. Young, (Executive Director of the National Urban League), Harry Hopkins (FDR confidant and head of the Works Progress Administration), Dorothy Height (National Council of Negro Women) and Jeanette Rankin (first woman elected to Congress) (NASW, Social Work History, 2003). This is certainly an impressive list, but only Dorothy Height, in her 90s, is still alive. With the exception of Whitney Young, no one on the NASW list had a social work degree and can legitimately be called a social worker. Moreover, if these reformers were still alive, they would be ineligible to sit for the licensing examination. Nor could they teach a practice course in a social work program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), since they lacked two years of post-MSW practice experience. These reformers would also be violating state licensing laws if they called themselves social workers. Consequently, much of social work history is based on fiction, since only one of these heroes can be legitimately labeled as a social worker by today's standards.

Even a cursory review of historical literature illustrates that the glory days of social work (the early 1900s-1930s) was dominated by reformers who migrated to the profession from other

fields such as political science (Frances Perkins), economics (Wilbur Cohen, Mary van Kleeck), education (Jane Addams), nursing (Lillian Wald), philosophy (Florence Kelley), sociology (Robert Woods) and journalism (Paul Kellogg). Without a formal organization to bestow the appellation of "social worker," the connection to the profession occurred largely through self- labeling. One was a social worker if one considered oneself to be a social worker.

Early social work was a refuge for disaffected intellectuals that could not (or would not) fit into a conventional academic discipline. It was also an outlet for those people that felt a strong commitment to social justice. Social work was a magnet for progressive reformers and thinkers in diverse disciplines that were attracted to the profession because of a common cause. And, it was a home where disenfranchised intellectuals could find like minds. Social work was an area that fused intellectual theories with social action (Chambers, 1980). In that sense, early social work reformers were committed to a broad cause rather than a narrow discipline.

The early 20th century saw the rise of social work-educated practitioners who craved the legitimacy accorded by professionalization (Lubove,1969). With the advent of professional education in the early 1900s, many social workers began to develop a strong professional identity. In contrast to early reformers, for these practitioners the connection was stronger to the profession than the cause of social justice.

By the early 1960s, social work had virtually abandoned its intellectual roots, and in the process, relinquished the utopian vision that guided early reformers. The decline of the public intellectual—whether in social policy, community organization or micro practice—began as early as the 1920s (Lubove, 1969). Consequently, the utopian vision of reformers began to fade as social work followed the lead of medicine and moved through the twentieth century embracing professionalism and pragmatism (Lubove,1969; Leiby, 1978, Chambers, 1980; Trattner, 1998). For instance, even when social work addressed larger macro issues, it was often in the form of incremental changes that were bureaucratic rather than visionary. More scientific and sterile approaches to policy and planning supplanted the broad social vision of early

reformers. Even practice theories were under assault, and by the late 1960s, the intellectually- driven psychodynamic orientation was judged irrelevant and even misogynistic. Depth psychology was replaced by pragmatic, task oriented therapies. The most significant decision in clinical practice was to pair social work with psychiatry by relying on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). Licensing became a necessary prerequisite for third-party reimbursement, which only furthered the reliance on the DSM. Not surprisingly, the move toward professionalization transformed social work into a marketplace commodity as skill- building replaced intellectual training. Predictably, social work was led farther away from its early vision of social justice. In that sense, the social work profession substituted a narrow preoccupation with methods and skills for a utopian vision of social justice.

The decision of the social work profession to focus on methods and skills rather than social justice, fostered an anti-intellectualism rooted in pragmatism. One of the most striking consequences of the pursuit for professional identity was the substitution of inclusivity for exclusivity. Specifically, instead of being inclusive—i.e., welcoming those willing to define themselves as social workers—the profession became exclusive as professional education and credentials superseded knowledge, competence and reputation. If the social work profession could not legitimately lay claim to a unique body of knowledge, then it could at least appropriate a broad occupational category.

While non social work-degreed reformers were honored speakers and awarded plaques, they were simultaneously denied admission into the inner circles of the profession, such as membership on the NASW and CSWE boards of directors, and editorial positions on mainstream journals. By enforcing exclusivity, the social work profession squashed the very intellectual and interdisciplinary vibrancy that gave it public recognition. Forced out by territorialism and a rigid allegiance to professionalism, early social work reformers wandered into other movements, such as labor unions, community organizations, universities and advocacy organizations. Not coincidentally, the more social work clung to exclusivity and parochial professionalism, the less salient its message became. Nowadays, the social work profession is

probably less understood by the general public than it was 100 years ago.

Abraham Flexner (1915) accused social work of not being a fully-fledged profession as early as 1915. Almost 100 years later, social workers still can not adequately define their profession. Nor is the profession any closer to finding a unique niche than at the beginning of the 20th century. In fact, social work is losing ground in mental health where it now competes with nursing, counseling psychology, marriage and family therapy, and other disciplines eager to claim this turf. After almost 100 years in a university setting, there are fewer deans of social work than in 1980, despite the rapid growth of social work degree programs. Virtually every new social work program developed in the last 20 years has been part of another college or department (Karger & Stoesz, 2003). Despite 100 years of professional education, social work has yet to produce the caliber of self-defined social work reformers that forged their place in American social history. Perhaps it is time for the social work profession to reconsider professional exclusivity.

Instead of clinging to professional exclusivity, social work can reclaim part of its lost intellectual heritage by adopting a more inclusive approach. Like the early 1900s, many of today's progressive public intellectuals and academics are uncomfortable in their disciplines and searching for a home that provides more freedom to pursue their interests. This group includes progressive sociologists looking for venues for applied research; economists unhappy with the conservative bent of their discipline; and progressive educators, attorneys, journalists, community activists and politicians. By inviting dissident scholars, activists and intellectuals into the profession—much as they were in the early 1900s—some of the intellectual vitality missing in modern social work can be restored. This cross-fertilization can also help cultivate a cadre of public intellectuals able to effectively address social issues.

Adopting an inclusive orientation would result in important changes within the profession. For one, social work would be forced to substitute more permeable professional boundaries for parochial professionalism. In that sense, the profession could become an umbrella capable of sheltering intellectual fugitives from various disciplines, while at the same time, forging a unique

social work orientation. For example, social work licensing could be redefined to pertain only to positions in mental health, physical health, and child welfare that would benefit from this kind of regulation. Courses in social work programs would be taught by instructors best able to teach them, regardless of their disciplinary background. By broadening professional boundaries, those who share a social work orientation would not only be eligible to teach, but also to publicly promote a progressive agenda under the banner of social work.

Although social work has a unique orientation—the person-in-environment—it lacks a clear body of discipline-specific knowledge. Moreover, the sociological, philosophical, economic and social theories that informed social work education pioneers, such as London School of Economics-trained Edith Abbott, is absent from much of contemporary social work education. For example, while textbooks on human behavior cover a wide range of theories, the brevity of the examination leads to texts more appropriate for undergraduate survey courses than graduate education. Consequently, the more in-depth and critical writings on culture, individuals, and society have been done by scholars in the social sciences, the humanities and cultural studies. Historically, the strength of social work education lies not in creating new theories, but in synthesizing existing ones. Ironically, while social work educators are quick to adopt theories in biology, cultural and women's studies, social ecology, and so forth, they refuse to invite in the scholars that developed or are using those ideas.

Academia and the Demise of the Public Intellectual

In the *Last Intellectual*, Russell Jacoby (1987) maintains that the American intellectual landscape was historically populated by important thinkers such as Irving Howe, Daniel Bell, John Kenneth Galbraith, Lionel Trilling, Edmund Wilson, Thorstein Veblen, Lewis Mumford, and others. Jacoby argues that these public intellectuals are long gone and no younger group of a similar stature are succeeding them. He attributes this phenomenon to the rapid growth of American universities that occurred during the 1960s and 1970s.

According to Jacoby, the academization of the American Left in the early 1970s led to a decline in the quality of public-oriented

critical writing. Earlier intellectuals capable of straddling the line between scholarship and public literary venues were replaced by academic careerists that exploited theoretically fashionable prejudices to secure tenure. Unlike former intellectuals that wrote for the public, today's progressive thinkers retreat into expanding universities, where the politics of tenure, promotion and merit pay loom larger than the call to participate in public life. Jacoby maintains that modern intellectuals have become specialists and teachers, mainly addressing themselves to other colleagues and a few chosen students. Only a few intellectuals court a wider public audience, and they often face criticism because of a lack of objectivity. The academy's disdain of public discourse has produced intellectuals preoccupied with methodological correctness and academic careerism (Wolfe, 2001). As a result, the vision and prose of intellectual life is suffocated by the ideology of conformity. What remains is stilted language and microscopic concepts understandable to only a few students or academics. Predictably, this intellectual vacuum saps the vitality of American intellectual life.

Factors That Hinder the Rise of Public Intellectuals in Social Work

Social work education has provided succor to the forces bent on turning American universities into specialized vocational centers. Specifically, this occurs by requiring internships that eclipse the number of classroom hours, open admissions policies, diminished expectations for intellectual work by students and faculty, the failure to terminate students except in the most egregious cases, and the refusal to acknowledge some validity in national testing (Karger & Stoesz, 2003). Social work educators have been complicit in the trend toward vocationalization by allowing the discipline to be viewed as technical/vocational rather than academic. This orientation has also mitigated against the re-emergence of social work-identified public intellectuals.

The transformation of social work from an academic discipline to a vocation is justified by the argument that a professional school requires a different set of expectations. Unfortunately, these "different expectations" often translate into less

emphasis on critical thought and rigorous scholarship: Disci-
plines develop theories while vocations develop techniques. The
trend toward vocationalization also results in social work educa-
tors being viewed as technicians instead of academics. The anti-
intellectualism manifested in a vocational approach also reflects
the institutional failure of social work education. Specifically,
even though several schools of social work are housed in world-
class universities, few have developed a theoretically coherent
school of thought by which they are internationally recognized.
Even in cases where a school of thought has emerged, such as
ecological theory or the strengths-based perspective, it has never
extended beyond the boundaries of social work education. While
social work blithely adopts theories from other disciplines, no
discipline appears to have adopted theories from social work.

The Role of Research in Social Work Education

Intellectual rigor, curiosity, and a drive to expand multi-
disciplinary knowledge are becoming traits rarely rewarded in
academia. Instead, praise and rewards are heaped upon faculty
that exhibit a workmanlike approach to academic life—find a
sub-specialization, stake claim to it, and then mine it relentlessly.
Lost is the thrill of intellectual discovery and the excitement of
synthesizing seemingly disparate ideas into a larger framework.
The result is the subordination of intellectual life into routine
work, and the squelching of ambitious thinking that leads to new
intellectual paradigms. Although specialization is commonplace
in all academic disciplines, social work has a unique mission, one
that includes a strong commitment to social justice. As such, the
emphasis on micro-specialization may be a questionable pursuit
for the social work profession.

New social work faculty are encouraged to find research top-
ics rife for future funding. This advice ensures that new academics
will adjust to the entrepreneurial nature of academia, where the
generation of knowledge is secondary to the generation of rev-
enues. In large measure, this represents the adjustment to an
academic cottage industry in which intellectual ideas are mainly
prized for the cash they generate. The value of faculty members
are being increasingly determined by the fiscal value of their
ideas.

The focus on grants and funded research often results in a dispassionate approach to academic life. Specialists toiling away in federal or state designated research areas do not produce the kind of scholarship that addresses the larger questions. In fact, many academics avoid the big picture since federal and state agencies rarely fund that type of research. Indeed, theoretical research is often dismissed as being scientifically spurious or too popular to be taken seriously.

Following other disciplines, social work has striven to apply rigorous scientific research methods to human problems. Despite this commitment, most quantitative studies in social work have neither been especially productive nor spectacular in their impact. William Epstein summarizes the dilemma:

> There is not one scientifically credible proof that any social work intervention—even broadly conceived to include psychotherapy, counseling, drug and alcohol interventions, job training, delinquency services—has ever provided prevention, treatment, or rehabilitation under any condition of laboratory or field investigation with any type of service recipients. Social work has not even approximated a definite study. . . . The best of the field's studies, its champions of rationality, come apart under even perfunctory review. (Epstein, 2002, p. 1).

Social work's commitment to quantitative methodology has not made it more competitive, nor has it increased its credibility in the eyes of other disciplines. Scales employed in quantitative research are typically imported from other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, political science or organizational behavior. Moreover, social work studies are rarely cited outside the discipline or are duplicated within the profession, no less outside of it.

If social worker's aspire to regain their former status as public intellectuals, they must develop research methodologies relevant to the mission of the profession. These methodologies should focus on the strengths of the profession; namely, its concern with social justice and direct contact with clients. No single methodology will move the profession closer to greater legitimation (Stoesz, 2003). Although specialization may be appropriate at times, social work educators should be encouraged to move from narrow

research topics into broader areas with greater social salience and a wider audience.

During the early 20th century, social workers led the drive to develop bold socially relevant research. In particular, the early days of the profession were marked by important and innovative research, known as the social survey movement (Zimbalist, 1977; Chambers, 1971). According to Mullen (2002), early social work research looked outward at social conditions rather than inward at professional intervention. The themes of this research centered around quantitative studies on the causes and prevalence of poverty; descriptive surveys documenting the social condition of the urban poor; the development of measures to describe social conditions like economic dependency and social need (e.g., social indicators); and a variety of research efforts directed at describing multi-problem families (Zimbalist, 1977). Research did not focus on examining the effectiveness of social work; instead, it was grounded in the belief that social workers needed to understand the problems of the poor if they were going to change their lives through social policy and social action.

The social survey movement was a response to the emerging urban problems chronicled by settlement houses. It was also a reaction to the work of 19th and 20th century crusading journalists, such as Jacob Riis, Lincoln Steffens, Paul Kellogg, Upton Sinclair and others. In that sense, the social survey movement blended journalistic fervor with social science research methods. The movement became so popular that by 1914 more than 100 cities in 34 states were involved in social surveys (Zimbalist, 1977). Despite its flaws, the social survey movement was influential in shaping social policy and public opinion. As Mary van Kleeck wrote, "the development of workmen's compensation may be traced to interest which was stimulated by the Pittsburgh Survey" (van Kleeck, p. 422).

However flawed, the social survey movement reflected the acknowledgment by social work leaders that contributing to public life, public discourse, and furthering social justice was an important goal (Zimbalist, 1977). Eventually, the survey movement was abandoned because it lacked rigorous scientific methodology. The movement clearly contained too much journalism to make it scientifically acceptable for a profession struggling for legitimacy

(von Tungeln, 1927). Although social work cannot resurrect the social survey movement, much can be learned about formulating research problems that advance the profession while appealing to the interests of the larger public.

Conclusion

Early social work reformers saw themselves as the conscience of the nation. Nowadays, social work can advance beyond narrow professional and academic confines and come closer to its original mission of social reform. The profession can accomplish this by overcoming professional exclusivity and reassessing the goals and expectations of social work education. Strategies can be developed to help social workers become vital participants in public discourse. To this end, social work faculty should be encouraged to disseminate research in diverse formats such as newspaper editorials, radio and television interviews, magazine articles and through authoring trade or general readership books. In turn, non-refereed articles and general audience trade books should be treated as research not service. The criteria for tenure, promotion and merit should also be tailored to enhance its relevancy to the social justice mission of the profession. This does not imply that social work faculty should be absolved of research responsibilities. On the contrary, research is central to the intellectual life of the profession.

This is an opportune time for social work to develop a cadre of public intellectuals, especially since many social science disciplines have become virtually irrelevant in public life. Once in the forefront of public intellectual life, sociology has been reduced to a service discipline in many universities because of its near obsession with arcane quantitative methods and its prolonged bouts of internecine warfare. While political science once spawned respected commentators on public life, many of today's political scientists have been demoted to conducting electoral or public opinion polls. As such, political scientists have become measurers rather than shapers of American political opinion. The current poverty in academia permeates most social science disciplines, and their retreat into narrower and more technical domains opens a window of opportunity for social work to lead rather than

follow. Moreover, the conservatism that has riddled American life, including much of academia, has resulted in scores of academic and intellectual refugees. Social work can help beleaguered progressives by welcoming them into the profession. This cross-fertilization would not only assist intellectual fugitives, but would breathe new life into social work education and the profession in general. Social work has an opportunity to create its own research niche, one that fuses social concerns with innovative and exciting research methodologies. In short, the profession is at an important crossroads. It can either continue on the current path and sink deeper into irrelevancy, or it can be proactive and develop its own unique agenda. If social work chooses the latter, it can become an example for other disciplines, while at the same time, reclaiming the glory of its past.

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