

Wellsprings of Empowerment in the U.S.

and

Pathways of Social Work Research on Empowerment

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“The democratic form of church-meeting being not an end in itself but a means of discovering ‘the government of the Spirit; and ... it was the church-meeting which gave birth, in England, to political democracy, not vice versa.” And what is true of England is true also for New England where strong connections also existed between religious and political culture. **On both sides of the Atlantic, lay people who believed they could comprehend God’s plan for the church believed themselves capable of choosing the forms and leaders of secular society, as well** (emphasis added).

Francis J. Bremer (2015).

Embedded quotation from Geoffrey F. Nuttall (1992)

Part I: Wellspring of Empowerment in the U.S.

The theme of empowerment in social work has drawn substantial attention from practitioners and scholars since Barbara Bryant Solomon introduced the term to the profession in 1976 in her path-breaking book, *Black Empowerment: Social Work in Oppressed Communities*. (Solomon 1976). The numbers of books and articles on social work and empowerment have mushroomed over the past four decades within the social work profession's publications. A tiny sample includes: *Empowerment, Participation and Social Work* by Robert Adams (2008); "Recovering Empowerment: De-personalizing and Re-politicizing Adolescent Female Sexuality" by Laina Bai-Chang (2012); "Empowerment, Lifelong Learning and Recovery in Mental Health: Towards a New Paradigm" by Agnes Bezzina (2014); "Translating Daoist Concepts into Integrative Social Work Practice: An Empowerment Program for Persons with Depressive Symptoms" by Celia Chan et al., (2014); "Empowering Disaster-Affected Communities for Long-Term Reconstruction: Intervening in Sri Lanka After the Tsunami" by Lena Dominelli (2013); *An Empowering Approach to Managing Social Service Organizations* by Donna Hardina (2007); *The Empowerment Approach to Social Work Practice: Building the Beloved Community* by Judith Lee (1994); "Empowerment, Assessment, Care Management and the Skilled Worker" by Karen Postle (2014); *The Empowerment Tradition in American Social Work: A History [electronic version]* by Barbara Simon (1999); and "Empowerment in Context: Lessons in Hip-Hop Culture for Social Work Practice" by Raphael Travis, Jr., & Anne Deepak (2011).

Empowerment thinking and action pervade every level of contemporary social work, including practice with individuals, couples, families, groups, communities, populations, organizations, nations, and regions of the world. Since empowerment as a concept and process continues to suffuse social work's programs and activities, as well as inspire and challenge creators of the literature of the profession, I deem the term "empowerment" to be a **keyword**. The British cultural critic, the late and remarkable Raymond Williams, introduced the concept of "keyword" and argued that such a term not only characterizes social reality, but also molds it. According to Williams, a keyword constitutes a cultural space in which the core sense of a term is struggled over and

negotiated. A keyword, in short, performs as well as represents, shapes meanings while at the same time describing them. Today I will explore the wellsprings of this pivotal idea and approach in the early history of the earliest New England colonies of Great Britain that later became part of the United States. Then I shall trace the influence of ordinary colonists' experiences with being empowered on the 21st-century expectations, hopes, and aims of us social workers who are engaged with historically marginalized residents and citizens and under-represented communities and populations that make up the main constituencies of American practitioners of social work and, indeed, social workers across the globe.

However, first, before turning our attention back to New England's 17th century, I must define this keyword within the profession of social work. I view **empowerment as the process of inspiring people to 1) work together to realize their full rights as civil participants and global citizens; 2) mobilize those resources necessary for a secure and dignified existence across the life course; and 3) reach for the fullest possible development of their individual and collective strengths and capacities** (Sen, 2011).

New England Puritans and Lay¹ Empowerment in Church Congregations

The two words, "Puritanism" and "empowerment," may not spring readily to mind as a pairing of ideas for many readers of Atlantic history since, prior to, roughly, the past two decades, many historical treatments of New England Puritans have characterized them as nothing but autocratic, rigid, and intolerant. For some, the Salem witch trials of 1692-1693, a horrific set of episodes of authoritarianism, repression, and misogyny,

¹ A layman or laywoman in 17th-century New England was a Protestant believer and participant in a religious congregation who was neither ordained nor appointed as a clergyperson. Most lay people had never studied in a seminary nor attended college, as all Puritan clergymen had.

represent the epitome of Puritan rule in the early New England colonies. The witch trials, persecutions, and executions were made famous by writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Arthur Miller, as well as a long list of other authors and historians who have studied 17th-century Massachusetts. More recent scholars, who have been investigating court archives, personal daily diaries, letters, and church congregations' records, however, have found ample evidence of the steady practice of participatory power by laymen and laywomen in shaping central activities, decisions, and relationships within church congregations of New England in the 1600s. To be sure, it is important to note, the voices and choices of Puritan laymen in the 1600s of New England were considerably more audible and visible in the record than those of Puritan laywomen. That fact should surprise no one, given that approximately 400 years later, men still continue to rule most churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques, at least in the United States.

Indeed, the empowerment of lay people in the Reformed Christian congregations of 17th-century Plymouth Colony, Massachusetts Bay Colony, the Colony of Connecticut, the New Haven Colony, and the Colony of Rhode Island took many forms, most of which had been practiced earlier in England or the Netherlands. One type of empowering participation for lay Puritans on both sides of the Atlantic was known as lay **conferencing**, the custom of holding meeting in private homes in which two or more lay Puritans fasted and prayed together, read and interpreted scripture, discussed recent sermons, sang psalms, and shared their handwritten commentaries on religious themes and questions (Bremer 2015 29). Both men and women took part in conferences. Often, conferences also involved lay people's sharing the narrative of their journey of faith and lapses from same. According to historian Bremer, conferencing served to strengthen participants' spirituality, grasp of Puritan theology and practice, interpretive capacities regarding scripture, and interpersonal and communal bonds (Bremer 2015 44). In many cases, clergy were not present during conferencing, leaving all leadership roles in those frequent meetings and conversations to lay members.

Conferencing among lay members had been a well-established custom and means of Puritan worship and study in England and the Netherlands under the reign of

Henry VIII, Edward VI (1546-1553) , and Queen Mary I of England (1553-1558), the latter being a notorious persecutor of Puritans, Anglicans, and other Protestants. Civil and church authorities called Protestant conferences “conventicles,” which were strictly outlawed under Bloody Mary, as she was known. Private homes, cellars, barns, taverns, warehouses, and shops became secret conferencing locations for banned gatherings. In good weather, Puritans conferenced in remote woods and fields to avoid the surveillance of authorities. Intent upon returning England to the Roman Catholic fold, Mary and her administrators sent to the stake at least 300 Protestant heretics (Bremer 2015 13). Her oppressive regime drove thousands of Puritans (Reformed Christians who worked to purify the Anglican Church) and separatists (Protestants who had removed themselves altogether from the Anglicanism) to flee to the European Continent (Bremer 2015 13). Approximately 20 separatist congregations were formed in various parts of the Netherlands during the Marian persecutions of the mid-1550s. Other Protestants fled to Geneva, Switzerland, Frankfurt, Germany, and Strasbourg, France. Conferencing became an underground lifeline for Protestant lay reformers in England and on the European Continent in times of oppression. Those Puritans and separatists who chose to emigrate to New England continued to rely upon conferences of laymen and laywomen. In the New England context, conferencing no longer had to be conducted in secret. Conferencing at congregants homes became a religious routine in New England in order to keep faith, intellect, spirit, Christian companionship, and theological and ethical dialogue alive in between Sundays, when church services and sermons were the featured foci.

Another activity that embodied lay empowerment within the religious realm of New England of the 17th century took the form of **gadding**, the custom, earlier practiced in England, of laymen and laywomen travelling together to a preacher outside of their own congregation to listen to a clergyman whom they viewed as more religiously pure or compelling than their local minister. Those who took part in gadding made a choice with their feet to privilege one minister’s sermon over another (MacCulloch 1999). Walking to and from the chosen Sunday service, laymen and laywomen discussed and interpreted scripture, recent sermons, and other religious topics. On the way home, they discussed the sermon of the day. Unsurprisingly, some New England clergy found

gadding an affront that undermined their authority and reputation, as well as their own congregation's attendance rates. Some clergy formally protested with church authorities the custom of lay people's gadding. However, there is no extant evidence that any anti-gadding warnings, fines, bans, or other official punishments were issued by Puritan authorities.

An additional empowering religious activity of ordinary colonial Puritans and separatists in New England colonies was **prophesying**. To prophesy as a layperson was to interpret the scriptures; raise questions about sermons, the Bible, or religious practices; answer inquiries about theology or rituals; and talk about contentious religious matters (Brachlow 1988 135). How could it be that these weighty responsibilities could be taken on by lay Puritans who had no seminary background, university degree, or ordination accreditation? The answers are twofold. First, lay Puritan congregations in New England, especially prior to the 1660s, frequently lacked the benefit of clergy. Too few ordained Puritan ministers had crossed over the Atlantic to serve the multiplying congregations of the faithful that spread out quickly in Massachusetts Bay, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. Having no clergy member in their midst, laymen and laywomen nonetheless carried on all the rituals, prayers, and services that they had been accustomed to in England and the Netherlands. The absence of clergy in small villages and towns required and inspired laymen and laywomen to fill the void.

The second reason that laymen and laywomen were capable of prophesying in New England of the 1600s – meaning, to interpret scripture and raise and answer questions authoritatively about leading godly lives and raising upright children -- was the great emphasis placed by early Protestantism on literacy for all believers, women and men, adults and children. Reading and writing were essential for Puritans and separatists from the first days of the Protestant Reformation. Reformed Protestants took to heart Martin Luther's doctrine of "a priesthood of all believers" that he articulated in 1520. (Luther 1520). Like Lutherans, Puritans believed that God viewed all baptized Christians as both spiritual beings and religious leaders.

For example, in 18th-century Finland, laws were passed that required Lutheran pastors to ensure the literacy of all their congregants. It was assumed that the primary

responsibility for ensuring the literacy of children in the Finnish language rested with parents. They were expected by their Protestant faith to either teach their children to read and write or get someone else to do so. Congregational ministers were charged during the 1700s with testing the literacy of all of their parishioners over the age of three on a yearly basis (Lavery 2006). Failure to do so or to produce evidence of having done so could and did result in clergymen's dismissal from ministerial ranks. Without literacy, one could not be a faithful Lutheran or Puritan. Daily Bible reading and study was part of the routine of an adult or child believer in Christian Protestantism. If one were to seek to learn God's will directly, without clergy as intermediaries, as Protestant tenets demanded, each person had to have the capability of studying the Bible as early in life as possible.

Like Lutheran Finns, Massachusetts Puritans cared greatly about universal literacy in their own ranks. In 1642, for example, a Massachusetts Bay Colony law was passed that required all heads of households to ensure that those who were in their charge (wives, children, aging parents, their younger sisters and brothers, and servants) learn how to read and write for the purpose of being able to read both the scriptures and the laws of the colony. The General Court of Massachusetts Bay in 1647 required all towns of 50 or more households to employ a teacher to instruct those heads of households who were incapable of fulfilling the literacy requirements. The law of 1647 also required larger towns to employ a grammar school teacher to prepare suitable boys for college. (Bremer, 2015,100). Small wonder, given the Puritan belief that there could be no godliness and therefore no salvation for illiterate church members, that Harvard College was established by the Massachusetts General Court in 1636, only six years after the first Puritans arrived to create settlements in and near Salem and Boston.

It is fair to claim, as historian David D. Hall has done, that "people who colonized New England established a system of church governance that shifted authority from clergy to laymen (sic) and made church membership voluntary and selective" (Hall, 2014). The New England Puritan practices by lay people of conferencing, gadding, and prophesying – made possible by the great shortage of ordained clergy and the universal

literacy of the lay population – constituted empowering activities and precedents within the religious sphere that soon bled into the public arena, as well.

New England Puritans and Lay Empowerment in Local Government

In the mid-1630s, many villages and towns were founded in Plymouth, Massachusetts Bay, Connecticut, and Rhode Island Colonies. The common local laws set forth in these colonial towns included all freemen in twice-yearly town meetings (Hall, 2011, 42). In Massachusetts Bay at that time, all white adult males who held membership in a Puritan church congregation were deemed freemen. The town meetings were (and in some small New England places today remain) face-to-face affairs that afforded every freeman an equal vote and opportunities to speak. A similar pattern of direct democracy soon developed that was completed by 1638 that included all freemen in twice-yearly meetings of a General Court, the highest New England authority in each New England colony. Also, each town within Massachusetts Bay, Plymouth, Connecticut, and Rhode Island colonies sent an elected committee to the twice-yearly meetings of their colony's respective General Court.

Having lived during part of the 16th century and early parts of the 17th through unrelenting persecution from Anglican Church authorities and from the English Crown, whether it was in Anglican or Roman Catholic hands, Pilgrims and Puritans were bound and determined to keep authority in check through rule by consent of governed freemen. They believed in the necessity of civil authority, just as they believed in the importance of governing their own spirit and will through prayer and daily self-inspection. For Pilgrims and Puritans long accustomed to obeying God's authority, the Bible's authority, and the head of household's authority, these were no anarchists. Instead they were architects of a form of religious and civil authority in which, according to Thomas Hooker, a revered Connecticut preacher and theologian, "power flowed upward from the people to those who acted as their rulers" (Hall, 2011, 42).

Taking strong issue with the Massachusetts Bay Colony's requirement that all voters and elected leaders be members in good standing of a Puritan congregation, Thomas Hooker in 1636 took approximately 100 Puritans with him to found a new

colony in the wilderness at a site that grew into Hartford, Connecticut. There he and his fellow and sister Puritans created a colonial government committed to *universal male Christian suffrage*, the first of its kind in all of Christendom. One did not have to be a Puritan to be an active civic participant in Connecticut; one only had to be a white male believer in the Christian Trinity. By 21st-century standards, of course, that standard is highly discriminatory. In the context of New England or any part of Europe in 1636, universal Christian suffrage for white males was a profound and democratic leap forward.

Another feature of civil governance of Puritan and Pilgrim New England was the then unusual pattern of mandated **annual** elections for town and colony officials. Convinced that power held over time could easily corrupt the most committed of democratically elected leaders, New Englanders issued a very short leash of only twelve months to their local, regional, and colonial officials. Those representatives who had been elected to lead town meetings, General Courts, or colonial assemblies who demonstrated arrogance, presumptuousness, or an inability to listen carefully and consult regularly with the people who elected him, were soon stripped of power at the next annual election. Indeed, in some places within New England in the 1630s, deputies, magistrates, and governors were elected **semi-annually** (Hall, 2011, 44).

New England Pilgrims and Puritans insisted that the governance of towns and, to an even greater extent, the governance of local congregations, was deeply **participatory**. So was the civil society as a whole, for the colonists brought with them from England and the Netherlands a cluster of assumptions and practices that abetted popular involvement in everyday politics. Among these assumptions and practices were an appetite for news, a confidence in sharing their opinions with local leaders, a facility for writing and reading, the custom of distributing handwritten texts to influence political decision-making, the experience of resisting (usually by ignoring) the rules of the Church of England, and the habit of using petitions to complain of grievances.

Another aspect of civil governance among New England Pilgrims and Puritans was the rule and custom that anyone in economic need, or anyone who had been left at a disadvantage when land was handed out, deserved special consideration. An ethics

of mutuality was present in some towns and in all religious congregations. This sense of shared and reciprocal responsibility for the welfare of all and of the downtrodden had been part of the English Poor Law tradition that assigned each town or jurisdiction to look after its own. No one in New England wanted to re-create the vagrants and idle poor seemingly omnipresent in England, which created a strain on local taxes there. Handing out land in New England was a practical means of keeping poverty at bay and caring for the disadvantaged. Equality, equitability, and fairness were the values each town and colony tried to follow in the yearly exercise of setting rates, collecting taxes, and distributing land. Of course, we must be mindful and note carefully that women as a group had few explicit privileges; servants had fewer still until their indentures were completed; and slaves had no privileges whatsoever.

They [the Puritans and Pilgrims] were virtually unique in the care with which they built participation into every layer of governance, from town and congregation to colony and confederation. . . . They were singular in distributing land to households in the form of tenure know as freehold -- that is, private ownership. Remarkably, a few colonists [in 17th-century Rhode Island] broke with the norms of English political culture and called their form of government a “democracy” (Hall, 2011, 19).

Legacies from Puritan New England for Empowerment-Based Social Work

What, a listener may well ask, do early New Englanders’ experiences with empowerment in religious congregations and local and colonial governments have to so with empowerment-based social work in 2015 in the U.S.? Given the patriarchal, racist,

and Christian-centered world in which Pilgrims and Puritans lived and worked, what possible legacies do we social workers inherit from them many years later?

I suggest that we have inherited in the U.S. three master narratives that our Pilgrim and Puritan predecessors handed down from their own empowerment experiences and experiments in congregational and civic governance. First, they carried with them from England and then planted a North American variety of collective responsibility for the general welfare. Second, Puritan and Pilgrim founders of New England took on and carved out active and direct participation in every aspect of church and civic governance. Finally, they evolved political and philanthropic processes that focused on diminishing the vast disparities in wealth, educational and economic opportunities, and social status that they had despised in England. Despite the thick blinders that they wore regarding race, gender, and religion by virtue of their 16th- and 17th-century European upbringings, early Pilgrims and Puritans created a far more equitable set of opportunities for immigrants and those born into landless New England households than was true anywhere in Europe or in other parts of the thirteen British colonies that later became the U.S.

MASTER NARRATIVE #1: COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE GENERAL WELFARE

In the belly of the beast of capitalism, social workers in the U.S. work against the cultural grain to extend the commitments that Pilgrims and Puritans established long ago to collective responsibility for the general welfare. Even as Republican Party Presidential candidates in 2015 call for severe reductions in Temporary Aid for Needy Families, food stamps, subsidized school breakfasts and lunches; Head Start pre-school programs for children from low-income households, subsidized medical programs for elders and people with disabilities, and federal supports for public transportation, social workers in the U.S. join with other progressives to fight off these threatened reductions and to increase federal- and state-level supports for the millions of working poor people and the unemployed.

MASTER NARRATIVE #2: ACTIVE AND DIRECT PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRATIC FORMS OF GOVERNANCE

Social workers in the U.S. differ among ourselves on many points of practice, policy, and research. However, there is clear consensus among us concerning the imperative of encouraging all our clients, patients, constituents, students, and members whom we serve to take an active and direct part in shaping their own health regimens, developmental trajectories, community institutions, workplace cultures, and ways of participating in governance at the local, state, and federal levels. Social work advocacy sometimes requires us to speak and write for clients; much more often, however, we seek to advocate alongside children, adolescents, and adults who are petitioning or marching for their fair share of rights, resources, and opportunities for fulfillment as human beings. The broad sweep of social movements currently active in the U.S. counts many a social work client and social worker in its ranks. Green politics, the fight against sex trafficking and domestic violence, LGBTQ rights, the sanctuary movement to protect immigrant children in the U.S. who have neither official documents nor families, and prison reform are just five of the many domains in which social workers and our clients take a direct part.

MASTER NARRATIVE #3: WORKING TOWARD ENHANCING EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITIES

Pilgrims and Puritans demonstrated through their land distribution policies and insistence on literacy for all, including servants and slaves, that they wanted to create a New World in which there would be no nobility and landed aristocracy that hoarded and monopolized power and wealth. As it turns out, we in the U.S. are now facing greater economic and social disparities and a growing threat of oligarchy than ever before in our history. Nonetheless, the blame for that growing inequality and reduced social mobility has nothing to do with the example set by early New Englanders. They, after all, sought to offer land to as many heads of households as possible and made free people who owned some land members of town meetings, General Courts, and colonial assemblies.

U.S. social workers labor in every level and type of school and in community-building efforts to help open doors of opportunity for immigrants and native-born Americans. Currently social workers are active in many initiatives to help former prisoners re-enter their home communities, re-unite with their families, and train for jobs with decent salaries. We are active in the campaign to raise the minimum wage to a livable wage. Social workers advocate alongside fast-food employees who are seeking family-friendly work schedules and enough earnings to live on. New York City is a haven for many survivors of torture from a wide variety of homelands. Social workers there assist torture survivors in documenting the execrable acts they have endured and witnessed, in suing their torturers, and in publicizing the names and locations of former persecutors. U.S. social workers also are anchors of the disability rights and recovery movements for people who experienced institutionalization in mental hospitals.

Conclusion to Part I

Barbara Solomon's vision of empowerment practice with oppressed communities did not spring in 1976 miraculously, like Athena, from the brow of Zeus. Her ideas and recommendations grew out of decades of social work practice with African American individuals, families, and communities that had faced grave poverty and apartheid in Jim Crow America. Solomon's call for an empowering approach came in the midst of a civil rights and Black Power movement that stood on the shoulders of abolitionists from a century earlier. And the abolitionists, in turn, had been raised in one of three ways: 1) as slaves, like Frederick Douglass or Harriet Tubman; 2) as children in New England Congregationalist households, like John Brown, who were only a few generations distant from Pilgrim and Puritan foremothers and forefathers; or 3) as Quakers, like the Grimke Sisters, who were pivotal in the U.S. abolitionist movement. In conclusion, the genealogy of Dr. Solomon's invaluable work is as old as slavery itself in the U.S. and as the Protestant forerunners of abolitionism -- be they Pilgrims, Puritans, or Quakers.

Part II: PATHWAYS OF SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH ON EMPOWERMENT

Researchers on the empowerment tradition in American social work have carved out five pathways of research since 1976 . They include: 1) holistic practice research by

social work practitioners embedded in community-based practice; 2) historical research by social workers who study social work ideas, practices, contexts, and social formations over time; 3) behavioral research by social workers who deploy a social psychology or public health lens; 4) spiritually and religiously-oriented scholarship on empowerment by social workers who are knowledgeable about sectarian worlds; and 5) research by social work educators who are inspired by political, philosophical, and sociological imperatives to investigate social movements, public and non-profit organizations, community-building, and mass action. All five avenues of research have yielded distinctive results. Most researchers on empowerment work in one, or at the most, two of the avenues I have identified. I now will discuss each in turn.

1) Holistic Practice Research by Embedded, Community-based Practitioners

Probably the most thoughtful research on empowerment-based practice in the U.S. is conducted by practitioner-researchers who are working at settlement houses or neighborhood centers in a holistic mode. Empowerment practice by holistic practitioners involves working with people who represent all ages of the life course in the places in which they live. Holistic practice also responds to the broadest imaginable assets and needs of the community being served. Additionally, holistic practice in an empowerment framework combines service, advocacy, and research.

A fine example is embodied in *The Enduring Advantage of Settlement Houses*, a program report available online that was researched and written in 2011 by Elizabeth a. McGee and Shelby H. Miller for United Neighborhood Houses of New York (UNH) (<file:///C:/Users/bls1/Downloads/The+Enduring+Advantage+of+Settlement+Houses.pdf>).

United Neighborhood Houses of New York, founded in 1919, is a coalition of 38 active settlement houses located in the five Boroughs of New York City. More than a half million people participate in UNH settlement-house activities and programs annually at more than 400 sites. This umbrella body conducts capacity-development, advocacy, and policy development in conjunction with its 38 member organizations.

McGee and Miller based their report on hundreds of interviews with participants in UNH members' activities and with all layers of settlement-houses' staff. They also studied many documents from the present and past of UNH and the 38 settlement houses that UNH supports. Their research is a strong illustration of ethnographic exploration combined with archival study.

2) Historical Research by Social Workers who Study Social Work Ideas, Practices, Contexts, and Organizations Over Time

This small but productive band of scholars is made up mostly of academics who are teaching in schools or programs of social work. Over the past quarter century, the core of historical empowerment research has sprung primarily from African American scholars, who have focused upon long-ignored or forgotten Black organizations, individuals, and movements that assisted African American slaves, free Blacks, sharecroppers living within the debt peonage system of the American South between 1865 and 1965, and African Americans who took part in the Great Migration from the American South to the North in the 20th century.

Some examples include the scholarship of Felix Armfield on the National Urban League (2012), Iris Carlton-LaNey on old people's county homes for Blacks, and Hilary Weaver on the Freedman's Aid Societies during the American Civil War, all of whom have brought overlooked actors and issues to national attention through careful study of court records, tax rolls, diaries, letters, and organizational archives. Similarly, Frederica Barrow has illuminated the contributions of Forrester Blanchard Washington, who directed the Negro Work Department of the New Deal's Federal Emergency Relief Administration. Audrey Johnson documented the pivotal labors of African American women leaders in social work throughout the 20th century who have received little or no previous notice. Ruby Gourdine and two co-authors brought to light Dr. Inabel Burns Lindsay's leadership in founding and directing the Howard University School of Social Work in Washington, D.C. And Alex Norman has analyzed the historical tensions and patterns of reconciliation between Black and Korean communities in the Los Angeles metropolitan area.

It must be noted, however, in the midst of cataloging important historical scholarship on empowerment practice, that there is little general interest within contemporary social work education in the U.S. in social work and social welfare history. In fact, there has been a dramatic decline in the last quarter of the 20th century and the first 15 years of the 21st century in the numbers of social work schools and programs that offer courses in social work and social welfare history when compared with the first half of the 20th century. My explanation for that decline is the decreasing focus in contemporary, American, social work scholarship on structural forces affecting communities, families, and individuals and the increasing pursuit of behavioral scholarship.

3) Behavioral Research on Empowerment by Social Workers who Deploy a Psychological or Public Health Lens

The lion's share of contemporary social work research on empowerment-based practice in the U.S. falls into the behavioral science realm. I have only room today to mention a selective few of this mountain of publications. For example, consider "The Parent/Guardian Empowerment in Schools Scale" by A. Ball; "Do Empowerment Strategies Facilitate Knowledge and Behavioral Change? The Impact of Public Health Advocacy on Health Outcomes" by T. D. Balfour; "Validation of the Employment Hope Scale: Measuring Psychological Self-Sufficiency Among Low-Income Job Seekers" by P.Y. P. Hong, *et al.*; and "Measuring Perceived Well-Being after Recreational Drumming: An Exploratory Factor Analysis" by T. MacMillan, *et al.*

Three major forces drive many American social work researchers into behaviorist research in the 21st century. First, prestige in most sectors of higher education in the U.S. is currently associated with sophisticated measurement. Social work schools, in my opinion, are aping sociology, economics, and psychology departments in their pursuit of hiring and tenuring faculty members whose main strength is mastery of the most sophisticated quantitative skills available. Practice experience and teaching capacities have become secondary considerations. Social science

departments, in turn, mimic the health sciences in their search for precision, predictors, and power.

The second reason why social work schools in the U.S. have, on the whole, become behavioral research institutes, is that research funding from the U.S. Government privileges behavioral research. The rise of prevention and intervention science within social work is in large part a creation of the National Institutes of Health and Mental Health and the Department of Justice of the U.S. Finally, I think that behaviorism rules the roost in contemporary American social work education because neo-liberalism as a philosophy and political theory continues to undergird much of U.S. politics and economics. The assumption of the many neoliberals who continue to make key decisions in policy-making and the giving of research grants by federal and state governments, think tanks, foundations, and corporations is that market mechanisms are strongly preferable to governmental interventions, no matter the topic or population. Market solutions are usually anchored in perceived individual preferences, rather than communal decision-making. Therefore, the highest prizes in the academy, as well as many other spheres, go to studies of individual performance, attitudes, and perceptions. Trends in social work dissertation topics in the U.S., as well as publications, directly reflect this market – or if you prefer – *Madmen* -- mindset.

4) Spiritually and Religiously-oriented Scholarship on Empowerment by Social Workers who are Knowledgeable about Sectarian Worlds

A fourth stream of research on empowerment practice in social work springs from those who study the relationship of spirituality and religiosity to well-being among communities, groups, families, and individuals. Again, I am only able here to cite a few of a rich and expanding collection of books and journal articles. Among the many publications are: “Empowerment in the Religious Stories and Art of the Virgin Mary” by M. N. Kane; “Liberation Theology, Group Work, and the Right of the Poor and Oppressed to Participate in the Life of the Community” by M. Breton; “Spirituality-Based Social Work Values for Empowering Human Service

Organizations” by Sondra S. Doe; “Faith, Hope and Mutual Support: Paths to Empowerment as Perceived by Women in Poverty” by Arlene B. Andrews *et al.*; and “Empowering African Americans through Social Work Practice: Integrating an Afrocentric Perspective, Ego Psychology, and Spirituality” by M. C. Manning, *et al.*

For the first eighty years of social work’s history in the U.S., religion and spirituality were considered taboo topics in practice and scholarship. Clearly, early social workers attempted to distance themselves from the Christian-infused charity and philanthropy approaches of their progenitors in Great Britain and the U.S. Scientific charity in the late 1870s and 1880s sought to replace religious emphases on benevolence and uplift with industrial and corporate management’s priorities on efficiency and objectivity. Then Freudian thinking within American social work, beginning in the 1920s, encouraged social workers to intervene psychologically, through interpersonal and introspective excavation on a psychological plane, one that had no room for religious or spiritual elements of life.

Once social workers and social work educators were several generations away from their 19th-century origins, its leaders could at last shed their “anxiety of influence” and embrace, slowly and cautiously to be sure, some clients and patients’ reports about the centrality of religion and matters of the spirit to their lives. From my point of view, that more inclusive orientation is much more likely to be empowering with the large proportion of the world that continues to draw strength and meaning from religions or spirituality.

5) Research by Social Workers and Educators on Empowerment who are Inspired by Social Movements and Politics

The final group of contributors to research on empowerment-based practice are people who joined social work as members of a wide variety of social movements and political communities. Authors on empowerment come from liberation movements about green politics, women; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people; Civil Rights, Black Power, and Black Lives Matter; immigrants; and

people with disabilities, to name only a few. Examples in the literature abound. Among them are: *African American Leadership: An Empowerment Tradition in American Social Work* by Iris Carlton-LaNey; *Anti-Oppressive Social Work Practice: Putting Theory into Action* by Karen Morgaine; *Black Power Movement and American Social Work* by Joyce Bell; *Progressives: Activism and Reform in American Society, 1893-1917* by Karen Pastorello; and *Activism and American Indian Issues: Opportunities and Roles for Social Workers* by Hilary Weaver.

This category of empowerment research and scholarship in social work embraces theories derived from economics, politics, anthropology, urban studies, rural studies, organizational studies, labor movements, psychology, sociology, public health, and the humanities. Primary sources for research are oral interviews, as well as archival and contemporary materials from political and social movements of the past and present. Frequently, thinkers and actors in social and political movements point out to social work researchers emergent and pivotal concerns to study. We in the academy, in short, follow the lead of people in the trenches of social, political, and cultural change.

Conclusion

Research in the U.S. on empowerment-oriented practice mirrors the fragmented nature of contemporary American social work. Some of us conduct studies in a community-based and holistic fashion. Others of us primarily consult historical archives for data. Still others favor a focus on human behavior and epidemiology. A fourth group foregrounds spirituality and religion in trying to assess empowerment and disempowerment. A final group features the theories and activities embraced by contemporary liberatory and environmental movements. All of these five approaches are pathways to expanded understandings of social work that empowers. Hopefully, in the future, American social work practitioners and researchers can do a better job of linking these five approaches, rather than viewing them as competitors.

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