Social Justice and Multiculturalism: Persistent Tensions in the History of U.S. Social Welfare and Social Work

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ABSTRACT *Social justice has been a central normative component of U.S. social welfare and social work for over a century, although the meaning and implications of the term have often been ambiguous. A major source of this ambiguity lies in the conflict between universalist views of social justice and those which focus on achieving justice for specific groups. This conflict has been masked by several long-standing assumptions about the relationship between social justice and multiculturalism – assumptions which have been challenged by recent developments.*

The assumption that the pursuit of social justice requires the creation of a more egalitarian society has been challenged by the new political-economic realities of globalization. The assumption that the maintenance of individual rights complements the pursuit of social equality has been challenged by racially-based attacks on social welfare benefits and civil rights. Most significantly, the assumption that a socially just society is one in which different groups share a compatible vision of social justice has been challenged by the realities of multiculturalism.

This paper explores the evolution of four themes regarding the relationship between social justice and multiculturalism during the past century and discusses their implications for the contemporary demographic and cultural context of the U.S. These themes are: the relationship of cultural diversity to the nation's values and goals; the contradiction between coerced cultural assimilation and coerced physical and social segregation; the relationship between individual and group identity and rights; and the linkage between "Americanization" and the equal application of justice.

Introduction

Since the turn of the 20th century, social justice has been a central normative component of U.S. social welfare and social work, although its definition and implications have often been ambiguous (Van Soest and Garcia, 2003; Reisch, 2002; Morris, 2002; Grogan, 2000). Today, while this ambiguity persists, mainstream social welfare organizations have established social justice as an ethical and curricular imperative of the field (Council on Social Work Education, 2001; National Association of Social Workers, 1996). A major source of this ambiguity lies in the conflict between views of social justice which focus on the problems of class and economic inequality and those that emphasize differences in race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, which are now grouped under the

label "multiculturalism" (Ewalt, Freeman, Kirk, and Poole, 1996). Recent attempts to resolve this conflict largely rely on Rawls' version of modern liberalism – which attempts to balance equality of individual and group rights and opportunities (Rawls, 1999, 2001) – or an updated expression of social democratic ideals (Gil, 1998). Prigoff (2003) asserts that a "social justice framework" includes access to vital resources, participation in critical decision making processes, and respect for human rights and the various dimensions of personal identity, particularly culture. These rights implicitly focus on individuals, consistent with the "person-in-environment" paradigm that has dominated U.S. social work for a century.

In current discourse, therefore, social justice is presumed to be consistent with multiculturalism – another term fraught with ambiguity – and with the reconciliation of individual and group rights and responsibilities (Fraser, 1995; Ramakrishnan and Balgopal, 1995; Van Soest, 1995; Caputo, 2000; Platt and Cooreman, 2001; Marsh, 2004). Yet, as Yee and Dumbrill (2003) point out, social justice is not an inevitable consequence of multiculturalism. They argue provocatively that by "essentializing and circumscribing people's social identities" multiculturalism maintains oppressive structures, undermines efforts to generate social action, and ignores the historical context that produces various forms of injustice (108-110). Potockey (1997) makes a similar criticism about the application of social justice to the international arena. Thus, efforts to expand the original meaning of social justice to reflect 21st century demographic realities have produced new conflicts and contradictions.

These contradictions have emerged because proponents of both social justice and multiculturalism have based their arguments on several debatable assumptions. First, that the pursuit of social justice requires the creation of a more egalitarian society whose principles of social organization reflect "the subordination of market price" (Marshall, 1950, quoted in Katz, 2002, p.1). Today, this assumption is challenged by the new political-economic realities of globalization and their accompanying ideological rationales (Pugh and Gould, 2000; Reisch, 2003).

A second assumption is that the maintenance of individual rights is complementary, if not essential, to the attainment of social equality. This assumption has been undermined by racially-based attacks on legal entitlements to social welfare benefits and efforts to roll back civil rights and opportunities through both judicial and legislative means (Piven, 2002). In the 2006 U.S. elections, many voters who supported ballot measures to increase the minimum wage also supported anti-immigrant and anti-affirmative action propositions.

A third assumption is that a socially just society is one in which both "economic and *social differences* between social classes and groups are markedly reduced" (Jansson, 2005, p. 24, emphasis added). This presumes that all groups in a society regard the reduction of social differences as socially just and desirable and that they share a common or at least compatible vision of what social justice means. Differences over gay rights, the status of women in families, and the role of organized religion in communities are merely the more controversial illustrations of divergent conceptions of social justice.

Throughout U.S. social welfare history, the discourse on social justice has largely occurred on a parallel track to those over racial, ethnic, gender or sexual equality. Yet, debates over the relationship between social justice and social welfare inevitably involve conflicts over the meaning of such terms as race, citizenship, and culture (Katz, 2002;

Gerstle, 2001; Foner, 1999). During the past two decades, the public furor over multiculturalism has made explicit these underlying and largely unacknowledged tensions (Yee and Dumbrill, 2003; Caputo, 2000; Potockey, 1997; Gould, 1996).

The Concept of Multiculturalism

Recurrent conflicts over the consequences of diversity reflect the tumultuous history of racial and ethnic relations in the U.S. Since the first half of the 19th century, proponents and critics of assimilation have battled over issues such as immigration, linguistic difference, and social equality. The underlying issue – whether cultural diversity constitutes a threat to the nation's values and goals – remains unresolved.

A related conflict emerged in the 20th century reflecting the contradiction between coerced cultural assimilation and coerced physical and social segregation. The views of both dominant and minority groups have alternated between an embrace of cultural amalgamation (i.e., the "melting pot") and a celebration of cultural separatism. This has shaped the debate about the nature of social justice in an increasingly diverse society.

A third theme involves the relationship between individual and group identity and rights. Through the mid-1960s, social justice in the U.S. was usually equated with the application of "colour-blind" meritocratic principles – in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s words (1963), that *individuals* be judged "not by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character." The emergence of multiculturalism in the past several decades has been, in part, a reaction against both the ideal and the reality of a colour blind society. Its proponents argue that in order to affirm individual identity it is essential to recognize the existence of systematic discrimination on the basis of group identity, which persists, in part, because of the conceptualization of racism and sexism in individual-to-individual terms (Johnson, 2001; Hill Collins, 2000; Young, 1990). As the controversy over Affirmative Action demonstrates, the U.S. is still struggling over the application of justice concepts based on individual rights to policies that address group needs.

A fourth theme involves the linkage between "Americanization" and the equal application of justice (Foner, 1999). This linkage not only concerns the meaning of citizenship, i.e., legal rights, but also the balance between the attainment of universal ideals of life and liberty and the preservation of cultural distinctions regarding the meaning of the "pursuit of happiness" (Katz, 2002). The question of how common political, economic, and social goals can be achieved in the context of increasingly cultural heterogeneity has yet to be answered.[1]

This paper explores the evolution of these themes in the U.S. during the past century and its implications for social justice in contemporary social welfare. It discusses the challenges of constructing a definition of social justice within changing demographic and cultural realities and its implications for contemporary social policy and social work.

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[1] Unfortunately, recent scholarship continues to be plagued by definitional ambiguity and conflicting principles. A content analysis of documents in the field of social welfare conducted by the author unearthed no less than 25 terms that have been used, in one form or another, as synonyms for multiculturalism. Each of these terms, however, has different nuances of meaning and serves different purposes.

The Emergence of Social Justice within Social Welfare

The term "social justice" first appeared in the social welfare field during the Progressive Era (~1890-1917) as a synthesis of religious and secular ideas (Leiby, 1978). It also reflected enlightened self-interest among elites in response to growing inequality and the perceived destruction of community bonds (Elshtain, 2002; Reisch and Andrews, 2001). "Justice," in their view, implied the substitution of charitable principles, norms, and relationships with universal standards of decency that would be enforced by the state and rationalized by new methods of social science (Addams, 1902; Wise, 1909; Tucker, 1913; Holder, 1922; Abbott, 1924).

These definitions of social justice combined liberal and social democratic principles including equal rights, the diminution of class privileges (especially those based on birth), the preservation of individual dignity, and the establishment of equal opportunity in the marketplace. These tenets, however, were applied primarily to white men of Northern and Western European ancestry. The history of U.S. social welfare in the past century reflects the struggle to make these rights and principles universal.

In depicting this struggle, two important points are often overlooked. First, groups striving to overcome various forms of social injustice, such as white male workers, women, racial minorities, gays and lesbians, and the disabled, did and do not – to this day – define either the concept of social justice or social justice-oriented goals in the same way. In fact, part of the struggle of each group has been a struggle to modify universal definitions of social justice, based on hegemonic values, to fit their particular historical circumstances and aspirations. This struggle has frequently caused tension and conflict between these groups and their mainstream allies, between different "minority groups" themselves, and even within their own ranks. These tensions have often made the development and maintenance of broad-based social justice coalitions difficult.

This leads to a second observation. Although it is widely accepted that the progress of social justice has been neither linear nor unidirectional, it is less frequently recognized how efforts to create a just society have transformed the meaning of social justice itself. Over the past several decades, the introduction of such concepts in the policy arena as Affirmative Action, comparable worth, reasonable accommodations, and gay marriage have expanded the meaning of social justice well beyond the elimination of discrimination and class or gender-based privilege. While the rhetoric of social justice in the social welfare field reflects this changing definition, the complex policy and practice implications of applying social justice principles to an increasingly diverse and contentious society have been generally ignored. Part of the problem lies in a failure to understand the peculiar evolution of these concepts.

The Origins of Multiculturalism

In contrast to debates over social justice, the discourse on what is now termed "multiculturalism" occurred in a variety of contexts, often without a clear or consistent focus. In the U.S., its central concern has been in relation to race, "a crucial line of division in American society since … the beginning of the 17th century" (Foner, 1999, p. 12). Ironically, at the turn of the 20th century, when social welfare leaders first proposed

re-orienting the field toward social justice, the nation was "more thoroughly racialized … than at any point in American history" (Foner, pp. 12-13). Although white proponents of social justice focused on the expansion of rights, the concurrent institutional and ideological abandonment of inclusive ideas of citizenship significantly stunted the growth of social justice within social welfare from the outset (Katz, 2002; Reisch, 1998).

Unlike European immigrants, people of colour did not have access to most white-run social service agencies, even many settlement houses which professed social justice goals. In response, through the services developed by women's clubs, churches, mutual aid and self-help groups, and benevolent societies, they forged a concept of racial or ethnic uplift, which combined elements of cultural pride and social assimilation that contrasted with mainstream conceptions of social justice which stressed "the general welfare" (Gordon, 1991). These efforts were severely constrained by a lack of resources and resistance from both white social welfare leaders and members of their own community (Day, 2003; Waites, 2001; Carlton-Laney, 2001; Iglehart and Becerra, 1996). Yet, given their "profound distrust of white people, the race lens through which [African Americans viewed] nearly all of life's circumstances" made perfect sense (Carlton-Laney, 2001, p. xiii).

Similar justifications existed among Asian and Mexican immigrants in the West and Southwest and Catholic and Jewish immigrants in major Eastern and Midwestern cities. Mexicans created mutual aid and self-help organizations to maintain their cultural equilibrium under oppressive social and economic conditions (Beito, 2001; Rivera, 1987; Hernandez, 1983). Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Filipino immigrants focused on economic gains and educational advancement and achieved considerable success on the West coast (Chan, 1991; Rivera and Erlich, 1998). Catholic and Jewish immigrants from Europe developed highly structured systems of social services, which included many features later adopted by mainstream organizations (O'Grady, 1931; Morris and Freund, 1966).

While these strategies enabled minorities to retain their heritage, languages, and customs, and provided them with some modicum of material, psychological, and physical security, they maintained the gap between the social welfare mainstream and those at its margins and made it more difficult to develop a unified vision of a socially just society. Ultimately, these different perspectives on social justice produced different varieties of social services and emphasized policy changes that went beyond the social reforms proposed by mainstream social welfare leaders to incorporate more comprehensive advocacy of racial and social equality (Hamilton and Hamilton, 1997; Reisch and Andrews, 2001).

In this regard, it is important to note that during the Progressive Era the concepts of race and culture were not equated as they are today. For example, while African American reformers agreed with white leaders of the settlement movement about the compatibility of cultural differences and the possibility of social integration, they added the critical dimension of race (and, occasionally, gender) as distinct components of the assimilation process (Lasch-Quinn, 1993; Gordon, 1991; Gordon, 1994). By expanding the idea of social justice to include themes of self-help, humanitarianism, and social equality, African American philanthropists and social service leaders redefined social justice in ways that would eventually have implications for the entire nation (Carson, 1993).

The creation of alternative social welfare institutions was a response to the failure of social welfare leaders to recognize how their focus on universal rights ignored the structural and ideological sources of racism and sexism. Well into the 1920s they accepted 19th century hierarchical conceptions of race, which conflated physical, behavioral, and cultural traits with social status (Johnson, 1923; Goldenweiser, 1922; Drachsler, 1922; Sturges, 1920). While remaining largely indifferent to issues affecting African Americans and other racial minorities, they continued to believe that so-called immigrant "races" – Hebrews, Slavs, and Italians, for example – could ultimately be assimilated through a combination of coercion and benevolence (Carson, 1990). They viewed education and equality of rights as the ultimate solutions to the problems of prejudice, intolerance, and discrimination, yet continued to assume that common ground and shared interests could be found without major structural adjustments in society (Wenocur and Reisch, 1989).

Thus, racist and sexist attitudes about the implications of demographic and cultural diversity influenced the development of the idea of social justice even within the relatively sympathetic confines of the social welfare field. Most of its leadership – predominantly white and Protestant – believed that social justice rested on either Christian or secular moral foundations which emphasized democracy and equality before the law, rather than equality of resources or power. Concepts such as cultural equality were not seriously considered, even by settlement leaders such as Jane Addams, who were aware of cultural diversity (Addams, 1902; Lasch-Quinn, 1993; Elshtain, 2002). These views were reinforced by their personal, professional, and cultural isolation from the diverse populations who were the objects of their concern. As Margolin (1997) writes, "Given the sudden convergence … of different races, nationalities, languages, faiths, customs, and political ideas, it is not surprising that people were profoundly suspicious of one another… that the monied classes were fearful of uprisings and mass violence… and that the impoverished foreigner would be the focus of these fears" (p. 14).

Social Justice and Racial Justice

Although most white social welfare leaders in the U.S. were tainted by racism, ethnocentrism, and religious prejudice, others such as Addams, Florence Kelley, Edith Abbott, Lillian Wald, and Sophinisba Breckinridge, tried to incorporate racial equality in their vision of a socially just, pluralistic society (Sklar, 1995, 1998; Daniels, 1989; Elshtain, 2002). Inspired by African American scholars and activists, particularly W.E.B. Dubois and Ida Wells Barnett, they began to develop the bases for the late 20th century concept of multiculturalism (Bent-Goodley, 2001). Addams' ideas, for example, combined a belief in democracy, humanism founded on religious principles, and a respect for cultural heterogeneity (Addams, 1902). Influenced by her ideas, studies by Louise Koven Bowen in Chicago and Mary White Ovington in New York, modeled in part on Dubois' 1899 work, *The Philadelphia Negro*, documented widespread discrimination in employment and housing against African Americans, even in the North (Lundblad, 1995; Elshtain, 2002; Sklar, 1998). Research by Mary van Kleeck (1915) under the auspices of the Russell Sage Foundation made similar contributions regarding the conditions of industrial workers, particularly women and girls.

Yet, with few exceptions, U.S. social welfare leaders could not embrace a vision of social justice that incorporated full social equality. Their acceptance of "segregation as either inescapable or desirable" and their failure to distinguish between the obstacles faced by European immigrants and African Americans, or immigrants from Latin America or Asia, severely constrained even the best-intentioned efforts at reform (Katz, 1986, p. 177). By regarding "the problems of all minorities as coextensive with the problems of immigrants, they failed to recognize that the social legislation passed during the Progressive Era had minimal impact on African Americans and that conditions facing [them during this period] … were … unlike those of white citizens and legal aliens" (Axinn and Stern, 2005, p. 133).

Consequently, their support for cultural pluralism, while laudable for its day, tried unsuccessfully to balance the rhetoric of a universal humanity and the recognition of unique social and economic problems, which required selective approaches to social policy. The conflict between rights-feminists and maternalists is just one example (Gordon, 1995). Although their language and sensibilities were decidedly different from those of reformers in later periods, they were struggling with similar ideological and professional dilemmas – specifically, whether the goals of social justice *as they defined them* and the preservation of a multicultural (i.e., pluralistic) society were compatible.

This attempt to reconcile diverse ends was not simply a matter of acknowledging the impact of cultural assimilation on terms dictated by hegemonic social groups. It would also require a philosophic and practical reorientation of goals and methods that was beyond the capacity, or even the comprehension of the vast majority of U.S. social welfare leaders. Throughout the 20th century, these shortcomings prevented the development of policies and programs that reflected social justice principles (Reisch, 1998). In response, minority communities constructed alternative strategies to achieve their own ideal of social justice.

The Rejection of Assimilation

Prior to World War I, through such organizations as the YWCA's Committee on Interracial Cooperation, the Methodist Women's Missionary Societies, and the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, white social welfare leaders demonstrated some willingness to work as equals with African Americans in multicultural coalitions (Weatherford, 1919; Hammond, 1917, 1920). They helped organize the NAACP and the National Urban League, and served as delegates to the 1921 Pan-African Congress under Dubois' leadership. By the First World War, the National Conference of Social Work (NCSW) had begun to integrate the ideas of social welfare leaders from minority groups into its conferences on a limited basis.

Yet, throughout this period, even the most reform-minded settlement houses continued to be racially segregated and the NCSW paid little attention to issues affecting racial minorities (Chandler, 2001; Carlton-Laney and Burwell, 1995; Iglehart and Becerra, 1995; Lasch-Quinn, 1993). Few mainstream social welfare leaders spoke out against restrictions on immigration, particularly those directed at Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and Mexican immigrants, who were largely regarded as either undesirable or "inassimilable" (Axinn and Stern, 2005). Some joined anti-immigration organizations

which expressed anti-Semitic and anti-Catholic views (Becker, 1968; Leiby, 1962). Much to her later regret, Jane Addams remained at the 1912 Progressive Party convention even after Theodore Roosevelt refused to seat African American delegates from Southern states (Elshtain, 2002; Rosenberg, 1992).

In response to this persistent racism and ethnocentrism, a few distinctive trends began to emerge among racial minority groups which shaped their pursuit of social justice. One was the rejection of the conception of assimilation. At NCSW conferences, African American speakers (Wright, 1920; Burns, 1920) charged that "melting pot" goals involved the loss of critical aspects of their communities' ethnic heritage. Roosevelt Wright declared in 1919, "The Negro wants a *democracy*, not a whiteocracy" (p. 286). This would include mutual respect, the end of oppressive laws and institutions, and equal rights and responsibilities. Similar appeals were made on behalf of Mexican immigrants (Alvarado, 1920).

Another trend was the appearance of splits among white social justice proponents over the issue of race. Florence Kelley, a lifelong socialist who helped found the NAACP and served as a delegate at the 1921 Pan-African Congress, criticized the National Women's Party (on whose executive committee she sat) for its failure to promote the needs of African American women (Sklar, 1995). Years later, at her funeral, Dubois eulogized her unique commitment to social justice and her opposition to "every single attempt to perpetuate in new law the old discrimination against American Negroes" which distinguished her beliefs from those of her erstwhile allies who failed "to see the plight of the American Negro as an integral part of the problem of American society" (Dubois, 1935, quoted in Aptheker, 1966, pp. 99-100).

A third trend was the use of specific issues, such as lynching in the South or industrial conditions for women workers, to create multi-racial and multi-ethnic coalitions in pursuit of social justice goals. In 1920, in cooperation with the National Federation of Colored Women's Clubs and both white and African American churches, the YWCA (1920) published a powerful indictment of Southern racial violence and specifically linked the anti-lynching movement to the cause of social justice and the preservation of the U.S. Constitution. Even these worthy efforts, however, were not without their ironies.

In its attempt to bridge the gap between African American and white women, "the YWCA used a language of Christian sisterhood to articulate their concerns about racial relations" (Robertson, 1987). This ignored the work on behalf of racial justice by Jewish leaders, such as Lillian Wald, and many African American activists in the South, which antedated that of the YWCA (Wald, 1915; Carlton-Laney, 2000; Salem, 1990; Hine, 1990). In addition, many white women in the YWCA had difficulty acknowledging the equal status of their African American "sisters" and were incapable of abandoning either their long-standing privilege or decades of social custom. One of the leaders of the anti-lynching crusade, Lily Hardy Hammond, continued to believe that racial justice and racial segregation were compatible (Hammond, 1917; Chandler, 1995).

A fourth and most significant trend was the emergence of increasingly vocal and visible contributions by African Americans to the national dialogue over social justice and racial equality. Marcus Garvey's movement for African American self-determination built upon and reinforced long-standing traditions of self-help. It also underscored the

importance of culture, not just race, as an organizing force and political rallying cry for other oppressed groups in U.S. society (Gerstle, 2001; Simon, 1994).

Perhaps the strongest argument for incorporating racial justice into universal conceptions of social justice in the 1920s appeared in the work of E. Franklin Frazier and Chandler Owen. A lifelong ally of labor pioneer, A. Philip Randolph, Owen's view of social justice combined a critique of capitalism, feminist ideas, and elements of "racial uplift" (Owen and Randolph, 1920). Frazier's writings (1924) reflected what Dubois earlier termed the "dual consciousness" of African Americans regarding racial justice and social justice and the ongoing tension it creates in their lives and work. The pursuit of the "dual agenda" implied in this consciousness distinguished African American efforts to achieve social justice from those of their white allies throughout most of the 20th century (Hamilton and Hamilton, 1997).

The Welfare State and Social Justice

Beginning with the New Deal in the 1930s, the establishment of welfare state policies created, at least in theory, the political vehicle through which structural inequalities in U.S. society could be reduced, if not eliminated. From the outset, however, these policies sustained and even strengthened institutional racism and ignored the disproportionate effects of the Great Depression on African Americans and other racial minorities in urban and rural areas alike (Washington, 1934; Haynes, 1935; Bunche, 1940). Like their predecessors during the Progressive Era, white reformers did not distinguish between the effects of poverty and those of racism, and refused to support policies that would compensate African Americans for the long-standing discrimination they had experienced (Jansson, 2005). In fact, the Roosevelt Administration consistently appeased racist sentiments (masked in the rhetoric of states' rights) in such critical areas as employment, public assistance, and child welfare (Patterson, 2000; Hamilton and Hamilton, 1997; Rose, 1994). Few social welfare leaders spoke out when Mexican Americans, many of them U.S. citizens, were deported during the 1930s (Galarza, 1929; Batten, 1930; Hanna, 1935; Anderson, 1940) or when Japanese Americans were incarcerated during World War II (Ennis, 1943; Pickett, 1943; Powell, 1943).

The failure of U.S. social welfare leaders to make the elimination of racism a component of their social justice goals can not be explained by prejudice, ignorance, social custom, and privilege alone. The American Association of Social Workers and other social welfare organizations were far ahead of other professional groups in banning racial discrimination within their ranks. Some settlement houses had begun to target services to African Americans and Mexican Americans in the 1930s (Fisher, 1980). Yet, all but the most radical social workers could not envision a socially just society or even a socially just system of social welfare except in terms of white, working and middle class concerns (Trolander, 1975). As a result, within mainstream political and social movements, the pursuit of social justice in the U.S. lacked a complementary drive to achieve racial justice until the resurgence of the civil rights movement in the 1950s.

One explanation for this failure is that the national mobilization required by the Depression, World War II, and the Cold War forced Americans to adopt, at least symbolically, an appearance of national unity which masked the persistence of social

inequalities based on race, religion, ethnicity, and gender. Although some movements for racial justice began during the war, it was not until the late 1940s that widespread protests against racial or religious discrimination re-emerged. It took even longer for similar reactions to appear among other minority groups. The roots of a post-war resurgence of social justice activity, however, can be found in wartime presentations at the National Conference of Social Work (Cramer, 1943; Granger, 1944; Lett, 1944). In 1944, Edwin Embree made these prescient remarks:

> The white man of the Western world is offered his last chance for equal status in world society. If he accepts equality, he can hold a self-respecting place – maybe a leading place – in the new order…But if the Western white man persists in trying to run the show, in exploiting the whole earth, in treating hundreds of millions of his neighbors as inferiors, then the fresh might of the … nonwhite, non-Western people may in a surging rebellion smash him into a non-entity (p. 109).

A second explanation is that post-war economic prosperity partially hid the existence of long-standing social divisions behind a veil of consumption, while the growth of suburbs isolated many white Americans from the problems of urban racial minorities (Sugrue, 1995). During the post-war period, therefore, most social justice work in the social welfare field focused on eradicating discrimination in employment, education, and housing, fostering inter-group and intercultural relations at the community level, and promoting civil rights through statutory means, even among radicals (Culberson, 1946; Thomas, 1947; Marcus, 1948; Gentile, 1951; Valien, 1949). The idea of the melting pot was still widely embraced as the means through which a socially justice society could ultimately be achieved (Mead, 1949).

In addition, the repressive climate of McCarthyism led large segments of the public to equate social justice movements, however modest, with Communist subversion. Many organizations that promoted social justice lost their tax-exempt status and experienced a precipitous drop in contributions and staff (Schrecker, 1998; Reisch and Andrews, 2001). Nevertheless, considerable progress occurred on several fronts, including the desegregation of the armed forces, annulment of anti-Japanese laws and the establishment of a Congressional commission to settle claims for damages suffered during their forced evacuation, and judicial attacks on school segregation, restrictions on voting rights, and the "separate but equal" doctrine (Baldwin, 1949).

A final explanation lies in the drive for professional status among social workers, which fostered a search for "universalist" theoretical frameworks that largely ignored the particular issues confronting racial and ethnic minorities and women or characterized differences in cultural norms as deviant (Kluckhorn, 1951; Barrabee, 1954; LaBarre, 1957; Rohrer, 1957). These tendencies persisted as the social welfare field began to grapple with the complex issues of class and caste, and the challenges of desegregation in the aftermath of the historic 1954 *Brown* decision (Warner, 1953; Mitchell, 1955; Rowan, 1956; Simons, 1956; Ryland and Wilson, 1954; Klineberg, 1957; Young, 1960).

Even during the relatively activist period of the 1960s, there was a paucity of literature on racism. Leading publications, such as *Social Work* and the *Encyclopedia of Social Work* did not devote much attention to the subject until the early 1970s, long after

the ferment of activism had subsided (Simon, 1994). The first NASW *Code of Ethics* (1960) did not address race and ethnicity explicitly. It was not until 1967 that the term "nondiscrimination" was added. Papers at the National Conference on Social Welfare focused on civil rights rather than institutional racism, although several speakers emphasized the linkage between race and poverty, and presented the different cultural orientations of African Americans in terms of equivalency rather than inferiority (Berry, 1963; Killian, 1964; Riessman, Cohen and Pearl, 1964; Collins, 1965). At the 1965 National Conference on Social Welfare, Whitney Young (1965) made an explicit connection between "equality for Negro citizens" as a right and economic and social justice (p. 53).

Although the National Association of Social Workers formally called for the abolition of white racism in 1969, pressure to preserve professional prerogatives produced growing tensions between mainstream social service agencies and community-based organizations in which racial and ethnic minorities played major roles (Rose, 1972). A particularly vivid illustration of this conflict occurred at the 1969 NCSW conference in New York City when demonstrators from the National Welfare Rights Organization used confrontation-style tactics to present their demands (*Proceedings* of National Conference on Social Welfare, 1969, 1970).

During the 1960s, the divergence of social justice and racial justice goals was also inadvertently undermined by the writings of activists and intellectuals of all races and ideologies. In his influential book, *The Other America* (1963), Michael Harrington, a democratic socialist, reinforced the long-standing notion that profound cultural differences existed between racial minorities and white, middle class Americans. Conservatives like Edwin Banfield and James Q. Wilson (1963) used similar arguments to critique the anti-poverty policies that Harrington's book had inspired. Influential spokespersons, such as Malcolm X (1964), and Charles Hamilton (1967), underscored the cultural differences of minority groups as part of a strategy to use enhanced cultural identity as a vehicle for community empowerment and liberation. Over the next decade, this approach was adopted by feminists, gay and lesbian activists, and leaders of disability rights movements.

These trends had several contradictory effects. On the one hand, by providing powerful rationales for the creation of separatist movements within communities of colour (and, to a lesser extent, among women, gays and lesbians, and the disabled), they inspired the development of new forms of scholarship, new models of social services and community development, and new theoretical frameworks that considerably expanded and revised the meaning of social justice in U.S. society (Nussbaum, 1999; Morris, 2002; Young, 1990; Hill Collins, 2000; Johnson, 2001). At the same time, the critique and widespread rejection of the liberal goals of assimilation, acculturation, and integration provided conservatives with a rationale to attack anti-poverty programs and other legislative or judicial attempts to achieve social justice (Murray, 1984; Mead, 1992).

Under the guise of promoting the use of social and behavioral science to inform public policy, even well-intentioned liberals resuscitated the Social Darwinist tendency to analyze social issues through the lens of group, rather than individual characteristics.[2]

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[2] Ironically, liberal precedent for such arguments existed in the use of Kenneth Clark's research to support the plaintiffs' case in the 1954 *Brown* decision and even as far back as 1909 in the testimony women settlement house leaders provided in the landmark case of *Muller v. Oregon*.

Paradoxically, this legitimated the use of research for both anti-egalitarian and social justice purposes. The controversies over the Moynihan Report (1965) about poverty in the African American community and Billingsley and Giovannoni's indictment of racism in the child welfare system (1972) are vivid examples of these diverse responses.

In the process of critiquing mainstream theoretical constructs about culture, society, and human needs, authors from racial minority groups and women often subsumed a universal emphasis on social justice within the more immediate concerns of confronting group-specific inequalities and oppression rooted in social identity (Chestang, 1970). Moore (1970) criticized the application of inappropriate paradigms to "groups who entered American society not as volunteer immigrants but through some form of involuntary relationship" (p. 463). There were calls within the social welfare field for a new separatism or "tribalism" to repair the social fabric and overcome the "virus of racism" (Dodson, 1970; Olan, 1971; Shannon, 1970; Morales, 1971). By the late 1970s, ethnic or gender-specific practice had become the norm in social welfare fields as diverse as youth work, services to the aging, mental health, and community development, often framed with the newly popular language of empowerment (Bretz, 1978; Ragan, 1978; Morales, 1978; Miranda, 1979). Revisions of the NASW *Code of Ethics* (1979) gave official sanction to these trends. The emergence of so-called "identity politics" produced tensions among former allies over social justice goals and strategies, which became particularly acute between African American and Jewish intellectuals, activists, and professionals (Becker, 1971).

Admittedly, the relationship between individual and group identity and the pursuit of social justice was a delicate problem to negotiate both intellectually and politically. Except among conservatives, there was broad acceptance of the need to address the systemic causes of social inequality and injustice and to analyze the effects of structural inequities within group constructs. James Dumpson's (1972) proposal to shift the field's "emphasis on individual pathology and rehabilitation" to a focus on "the basic systematic changes … [including] the removal of socioeconomic and racial barriers to an equitable redistribution of the power, wealth, and income of the nation" reflected this shift (pp. 4-5).[3] Yet, the persistence of "selective" approaches to the problems of poverty and inequality and the resurgence of cultural identity among racial and ethnic minorities combined to reinforce prevailing beliefs about the cultural divide between racial groups and genders (De Anda, 1984; Gilligan, 1982). Some observers criticized such debates for essentializing the concepts of race and gender and separating them from their social construction. It was difficult to envision an over-arching conception of social justice that satisfied these diverse tendencies (Longres, 1997).

In the political arena, the identification of anti-poverty programs as "Black programs" and their equation with the social welfare system as a whole generated increased hostility toward "welfare" among whites (Edsall and Edsall, 1992). Other significant political developments complicated efforts to expand the concept of social justice to include the emerging demands of women, gays, and lesbians. One was the 1965

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[3] The recurrence of this criticism throughout U.S. social welfare history, in slightly different form, is remarkable. See, for example, H. Specht and M. Courtney, *Unfaithful angels: How social work abandoned its mission* (New York: Free Press, 1994). What is equally remarkable is how little has been done to address these concerns.

Immigration Act which "represented a sharp ideological departure from the traditional view of America as a homogeneous white society" (Takaki, 1994, p. 419). Another was the controversial "maximum feasible participation" provision of anti-poverty programs created by the Office of Economic Opportunity, which gave considerable power to local community action agencies, especially in African American neighborhoods, and supported the preservation of indigenous cultural activities among Native Americans (Moynihan, 1965). A third was the passage of Title IX of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade*, which gave women legislative and judicial mandates to push for greater gender equality (Deckard, 1979). A fourth was the growing opposition to the use of Affirmative Action policies to achieve racial and gender equality, symbolized by the *Bakke* case (Farmer, 1978).

The movement for gender equality was particularly significant because for most of the 20th century the connection between women's rights and social justice had been largely ignored in the social welfare field (Chambers, 1986). Most feminist writing, research, and activism focused primarily on the specific needs of women, rather than their relationship to broader justice concepts. They tended to overlook the perspectives and needs of women of colour (Abramovitz, 1999; Gordon, 1991; Gordon, 1994).

By the late 1970s, however, themes such as the "feminization of poverty" helped women forge fragile alliances across racial and class lines (Deckard, 1979; Rosenberg, 1992). Although bolstered by the growing output of feminist research in the 1980s, efforts to create greater solidarity among women attempted to substitute, with limited success, the centrality of gender for that of race or class. Many activists and intellectuals of colour objected and, as a result, the fusion of universal social justice goals with more specific racial or gender justice goals was no closer to reality, despite the optimistic forecasts of some white feminists (Hooyman and Bricker-Jenkins, 1984).

In sum, the liberation movements of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s highlighted the contradictions between the prevailing rhetoric of social justice and the continuing focus of U.S. social welfare on individual, family, or community pathology, often tied (not always subtly) to racial, gender, or ethnic characteristics. The affirmation of group identity at the heart of these movements sought to overturn not only obvious manifestations of individual and institutional discrimination and inequality, but also to undermine the more benign, paternalistic thinking upon which they were based (Young, 1990). To achieve these goals, members of the dominant group (largely white, male heterosexuals) had to acknowledge their ignorance, recognize and renounce their privilege, and confront their role in maintaining various forms of societal injustice and oppression. It was never clearly established, however, how an egalitarian, social justice-oriented society (or even social welfare system) was to emerge from this intellectual and cultural catharsis (Johnson, 2001).

Post-Modernism, Multiculturalism, and Social Justice

The growing popularity and influence of perspectives once identified as solely the province of feminists, such as social constructionism, paved the way for the broader acceptance within the social welfare field of ideas derived from post-modernism (Leonard, 1997). During the past fifteen years, this development has produced a variety

of efforts to link the goals of social justice more closely with those of multiculturalism. They have challenged the dominant culture and normative power structure, particularly the oppressive relationships and unequal distribution of tangible and intangible resources they produce (Hyde, 1998; Leonard, 1995). Although some scholars continue to regard discriminatory policies and institutions as the principle roots of societal injustice, others have forcefully linked social justice to the eradication of the structural and relational sources of both racism and poverty. They have proposed ways to emancipate people from oppressive social arrangements through radical redistributive measures or alternative organizing strategies (Gibelman, 2000; Beck and Eichler, 2000).

By the 1990s, the concept of multiculturalism had evolved substantially from its original emphasis on racial justice and its assimilationist roots based on cultural pluralism. It had primarily become a means to encourage racial, ethnic, gender, and cultural diversity, strengthen group identity, consciousness, and esteem, and promote what would have formerly been regarded as separatist practice (Gross, 1995; Keyes, 1991). Among some scholars, multiculturalism has been limited to the addition of perspectives on race, gender, and sexual orientation into existing theoretical and conceptual frameworks (Gutierrez, 1997; Lum, 2000). Writings on multiculturalism tended, therefore, to focus narrowly on alternative practice or research models rather than broad structural analyses aimed at more general social justice goals.

A few scholars, however, have attempted to clarify the often ambiguous meaning of multiculturalism. Wohl (1995) disputed media criticisms of multiculturalism – which had characterized it--in language remarkably similar to that of a century ago--as a threat to national unity and as an outgrowth of racism and gender bias. In contrast, he defined multiculturalism as a series of "initiatives to discover through interchange across multiple diversities, the strengths of personal and group identity and the human treasure to be mined out of the richness of our cultural and historical differences" (p. 81). Fellin (2000) echoed this sentiment and proposed four principles of multiculturalism: inclusion, recognition, multiple identities, and demographic/cultural change.

Unlike previous discourse on civic equality, however, most U.S. scholars in the 1990s defined multiculturalism in terms which go beyond race, gender, and ethnicity (Greene and McGuire, 1998). While a few writers distinguished the concept of diversity from multiculturalism (de Anda, 1997; Dungee-Anderson and Beckett, 1995), most authors do not link either concept explicitly with social justice (Greene, Watkines, McNutt, and Lopez, 1998). According to Goldberg (2000), three conflicts emerge from these developments, including the "conflict between respecting the contents of all cultures versus supporting basic human rights" (p. 13). It is unclear how the remedy she proposed – that all people have "an unconditional right to their cultural identity" – can be translated into public policy when different identities clash with each other or take issue with universal conceptions of justice or rights.

Van Soest and Garcia (2003) also struggle to bridge the gaps between social justice and multiculturalism. They define the latter in terms of representation and democratic inclusiveness, rooted in the connections between politics and power, and the long-term consequences of institutional racism. In their recent analysis of five competing contemporary theories of justice, however, they identify only one which specifically addresses issues of race, ethnicity, or culture. Nevertheless, they argue that a focus on the effects of racism and oppression is inextricably linked to the promotion of social justice.

Based on a human rights perspective, they posit eight core "social justice values": life; freedom and liberty; equality and non-discrimination; justice; solidarity; social responsibility; evolution; peace and non-violence; and relations between humankind and nature (pp. 65-67). Unfortunately, their lack of specificity, tautological argumentation, and subjectivity in defining and applying these concepts render them more of an ideological statement than a guide for policy change or political organization.

In sum, recent developments in the social welfare field have further obscured the relationship between social justice and multiculturalism and made their goals appear less congruent than ever. Scholars have sought to reconcile these concepts through different means. One is a return to pragmatic liberalism. Another is a synthesis of the identity focus at the heart of post-modern and post-structural theory with earlier analyses based on Marxism. A third is through the use of alternative "bridging concepts" such as the recapture of public space, the construction of multiple domains of power, or the promotion of social development (Caputo, 2000; Leonard, 1995; Fisher and Karger, 1997; Hill Collins, 2000; Midgley, 1991). To date, no single synthesis has been widely embraced despite frequent entreaties from social welfare leaders (Marsh, 2004).

Conclusion

Despite the increasing sophistication of scholarly inquiry, U.S. social welfare continues to be impeded by several outdated assumptions about the relationship between social justice and multiculturalism. First, that the divisions within U.S. society occur primarily along a "majority-minority" axis that juxtaposes a dominant cultural group (e.g., males, whites, heterosexuals) with "others." Second, that "minority" groups will remain in minority status – in terms of power and resources, if not numbers – for the indefinite future. Third, that the expansion of social provision, whether through the market, the state, non-governmental organizations, or some combination thereof, will gradually create a more egalitarian, colour and gender-blind society, in which invidious discrimination will eventually disappear or significantly diminish. Fourth, that as society becomes more demographically diverse there will be increased support for more egalitarian policies among all populations and that a consensus will evolve about the roles of various sectors in achieving broadly defined social justice goals. Fifth, that concerns over multiculturalism are fully compatible with other social justice-related goals. Finally, that the resolution of racial, gender, and cultural inequalities is compatible with the maintenance of the major features of the U.S. economic and political systems.

The persistence of these assumptions, many of which have been challenged by recent trends, is both intellectually frustrating and politically constraining. At the most obvious level, new demographic realities underscore the increasing contradiction between the numerical status of so-called minority groups in many urban areas and the workforce as a whole and the persistence of institutional economic and social inequalities in employment, education, housing, and health care (U.S. Census, 2005). Prevailing assumptions also often fail to acknowledge that not all differences of status or privilege are equally significant in the distribution of societal goods, power, and opportunities. Less obviously, they obscure the growth of social and political tensions among and within minority communities which are reflected, for example, in conflicts over such

issues as abortion, faith-based social services, gay marriage, stem cell research, child welfare laws, school vouchers, welfare reform, and immigration.

Although there is widespread rejection of the "melting pot," it is not clear what alternative concept will provide the "social glue" to bind together an increasingly fractious multicultural society. Nor is it clear which principles of social justice can go beyond "feel good" rhetoric (demographic "mosaics" and cultural "salads") and shape meaningful policies which recognize the significance of differences without stereotyping them. A "human rights framework" appears to offer some promise as a bridging concept, but it, too, has been challenged because of potential cultural biases.

Yet, without some commonly shared guidelines, what vision of social justice can be adopted in societies where some communities' ideal of social justice directly contradicts those of others? Answering this question is increasingly important as the U.S. becomes simultaneously more socially isolated and unequal. Unless the meaning of both social justice and multiculturalism is redefined in ways that make them more compatible, the possibility of their attainment will diminish under the increasing and inevitable pressures of economic, environmental, and physical insecurities in the years ahead.

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