

Editorial

Dismantling White Supremacy in Social Work Education: We Build the Road by Walkingⁱ

**Charla Cannon Yearwood
Rosemary A. Barbera
Amy K. Fisher
Carol Hostetter**

We are excited to share this special edition of *Advances in Social Work* with you. When we distributed a call for abstracts, we were inundated – in a good way – with proposals. The need for social workers to discuss the role that white supremacy occupies within our history, education, and practice was obvious. Because of the number of abstracts received, we made the decision to publish a double edition so that the important information contained in these articles can be widely shared. The submissions fell into three general themes--historical, instructional, and institutional examinations. Each set of articles offers much for us to reflect and act upon moving forward. There is a reckoning happening and we are thrilled that this special edition is part of that reckoning.

The purpose of this issue is to spark curiosity and critical thought around the ways white supremacy permeates our profession and our teaching. The Black Lives Matter Movement, along with other movements, have increased our awareness of how white supremacy invades all aspects of our society and the systems that govern it. Social workers claim to make use of systems theory and to adhere to a Code of Ethics (NASW, 2021) that includes the values of social justice, integrity, and the dignity and worth of all as central to social work practice. Given these values and the use of systems theory, the focus on understanding the pervasiveness of white supremacy should not be a new idea for social work. However, it is important for us to slow down enough to consider our blind spots and reevaluate our complacency in the structures we claim to resist. While it is true that there has been racial reckoning of sorts in the United States since the ongoing and despicable murders of Black people by the police, very few concrete changes have happened, even within social work. For example, the Council on Social Work Education created a task force that examined the proposed 2022 educational and policy statements (EPAS). The very first competency in the proposed EPAS called on social workers to be anti-racist, to go beyond non-racism to actively fight against racism. In the same competency, however, CSWE continued to center gatekeeping – a white supremacist concept – and to prioritize “professional” communication, which really means white forms of communication (Gray, 2019). This centering of white norms is often carried over to discuss “professional” dress and hair styles within our profession.

Social work has a stated commitment to social justice. At the same time, social work practice and education have a long history of engaging in practices that are racist and that perpetuate white supremacy. The roots of social work in the United States are tied to the

Charla Cannon Yearwood, MSSW, LSW, Connected in Community, Indianapolis, IN. Rosemary A. Barbera, Ph.D., MSS, Associate Professor, Chair and BSW Program Director, La Salle University, Philadelphia, PA. Amy K. Fisher, J.D., LCSW, Department of Social Work, University of Mississippi, University, MS. Carol Hostetter, MSW, PhD, Professor and BSW Program Director, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.



eugenics movement (Gregory, 2020) and the theories used in social work are theories based on white, cisgender, heterosexual, patriarchal, capitalist worldviews. All of this is to say that social work does not live up to that expressed commitment to social justice.

Some ways that social work practice and education must interrogate themselves include the following:

- **Epistemology:** that is, how do we know what we know? Or better said, what kinds of theories are we perpetuating? Do we examine those theories closely to make sure they are not based on a white worldview?
- **History:** Whose history is taught? When we speak about the roots of social work there is often a good deal of focus on Settlement House leaders like Jane Addams as well as Charity Organization Societies leaders like Mary Richmond. Both of these leaders ignored the needs of Black and other people of color. And whose history has been left out (Day & Schiele, 2013)?
- **Research:** How do we conduct research? What are the frameworks we use? Do we look to indigenous knowledge and accept non-white ways of knowing? Often these ways of knowing are considered “non-scientific” (Almeida et al., 2019).
- **Community:** Do we prioritize individuals when in most of the world, community is more important? For example, Jerome Schiele (1997) points out that if we were to use an Afrocentric framework we would always consider the community implications of our practice since people exist only in communities. How do we incorporate this in our teaching and in the assignments we give students?
- **Boundaries:** In social work in the U.S. there is an emphasis on boundaries, but for people whose roots are in the global south, this notion of boundaries is not only unknown, but it also does harm.
- **Human Development:** How do we understand human development? Which theories are we using to explain how humans exist and grow in the world?
- **White Supremacy:** Do we explicitly name white supremacy in social work and call out the ways that social work continues to perpetuate white supremacy today?
- **Disproportionality:** Are we addressing disproportionality in the child welfare system (Lash, 2017; Roberts, 2008)?

All of this demonstrates how we prioritize whiteness and white ways of being in the world within social work. Even how we teach and learn – the emphasis on the written word over the spoken word, for instance – perpetuates whiteness.

The guest editors of this special edition of *Advances in Social Work* were organized through the Social Work Coalition for Anti-Racist Educators (SWCAREs). SWCAREs has a mission to dismantle white supremacy in social work education (www.swcares.org). With this mission in mind, we set out to stir up conversation and challenge ourselves and our colleagues to assess and understand the past and current impacts white supremacy has had on social work practice, research, and education. If we take an honest look at our practices, our theories, our policies, and our underlying worldview, we must admit that social work is guilty of perpetuating white supremacy. We call on social work to decenter whiteness and Eurocentric ways of seeing and being in the world from the curriculum.

As guest editors, we made several efforts to resist unnecessary procedures which have been historically used to police the expression and dissemination of research. For example, all proposed manuscripts which met our requirements were offered the opportunity to present their full piece for publication. This allowed us to provide feedback and support for new authors, and met our desire for a diverse representation of authors.

We asked our authors to follow the most recent guidelines of the Associated Press and capitalize the letter “B” when using “Black” to describe the cultural group, Black people (Associated Press, 2020). We also remained open to various methodologies that might challenge our traditional research or practice methodologies, since most research and forms of research are firmly entrenched in Eurocentric thinking.

The Special Double Issue

We divided the abundance of this special issue into three sections. In Section I, we begin at the beginning—a foundation built from the true history of social work along with current-day lived experiences of BIPOC social work students and teachers with racism in the academy and professional settings. Section II contains a wealth of instructional approaches, along with outcome evaluations that point to how to begin to know if these approaches aid in the goal of dismantling white supremacy in social work education. Section III includes institutional and extra-curricular approaches to dismantling white supremacy. We wrap this special issue up with several articles that issue a clear call to the profession for re-envisioning everything that we do.

Section I—Begin at the Beginning

We begin with a series of articles that provide recommendations for infusing an accurate history of social work into the curriculum so as to disrupt the dominant white narrative of social work history while lifting and celebrating contributions of social workers of color.

Snowden details how social work needs, kneads, and eats Black bodies in the way its concern for Black citizenship waxes and wanes depending on the profession’s needs. **Shepherd and Pritzker** challenge the existing historical narrative by focusing on the history of African American political social work. **McCleary and Simard** contribute to the critique by discussing frameworks for decolonizing social work pedagogy through a reconciliatory practice that aims to dismantle white supremacy. **Wright, Akin, and Carr** provide a review of the literature on social work history to reveal how it is whitewashed, and write about notable BIPOC social welfare leaders who should be added to the canon.

Next, we turn to the lived experiences of students and faculty of color. Intentional, unwavering, and enduring attention to the experiences of BIPOC students and faculty is essential to dismantling white supremacy in social work education. Three articles offer insight into experiences of students of color, along with recommendations for future action. **Fussell-Ware** present six challenges for Black, first-generation research doctoral students in social work programs. **Gooding and Mehrotra** detail results of a qualitative study of racial microaggressions as experienced by BIPOC students and field instructors in

placement settings, while **Johnson, Archibald, Estreet, and Morgan-Henry** conduct a critical analysis of challenges for Black social work students created by white supremacy during field education.

Turning to experiences of faculty, **Fields and Cunningham-Williams** provide a qualitative exploration of Black women faculty members' sense of self through the lenses of imposter syndrome and authenticity. **King-Jordan and Gil** explore the experiences of faculty of color when interacting with white colleagues, their students, and administration. **Azhar and DeLoach McCutcheon** contribute personal narratives regarding their own marginalization within white spaces and the emotional labor that BIPOC faculty are often asked to carry. **Duhaney and El-Lahib** elaborate on resistance from within—some of the ways in which they disrupt white supremacy and racist classroom dynamics. We end this section with **Rodgers'** qualitative investigation of Black professional womens' experiences within the academy using the lens of Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome as well as Post-Traumatic Growth.

Hipple, Reid, Williams, Gomez, Peyton, and Wolcott explore experiences of the impact of white supremacy in classroom spaces using principles of Griot storytelling, while **Bryant and Kolivoski** offer a mixed method investigation of faculty and administration's perceptions of the impact of whiteness and white supremacy within the profession. **Perez** investigates the experiences of faculty from different backgrounds teaching about race and racism in social work programs, while **Massey and Johnson** contribute an integrative literature review to see how recent literature characterizes “white ally” educators and explores concepts designed to prepare white educators for purposive action to dismantle white supremacy.

Section II--Instructional Approaches

This special issue contains a wealth of information on instructional approaches to dismantling white supremacy in social work education. **Mak, Mucina, and Ferguson** offer a vignette to explore politicizing seemingly benign moments in the classroom, along with an analysis of classroom dynamics and practical suggestions to enact change. **Ortega-Williams and McLane-Davis** present their critical pedagogical approaches as Black social work educators committed to liberation and healing.

Hanna, Garza, and Arnold-Renicker outline a curriculum on CRT and Critical White Studies used to both de-center whiteness and attend to the needs of BIPOC students, and **Gregory** provides a critical whiteness curriculum for social work. **Del-Villar** provides comprehensive definitions of key terms used in teaching social work practice from an anti-racist lens and argues for the use of an anti-racist social justice pedagogy.

Several articles focus on specific theories and models. **Crudup, Fike, and McLoone** use the Pyramid of White Supremacy Framework to critique social work and deconstruct post-racial fallacies ascendant within the profession. **Dagar, Maglalang, and Rao** present theories written by BIPOC scholars that can be used to raise the critical consciousness of social work students—Kapwa, Compa Love, Racial Triangulation Theory, Cultural Wealth, and Breath of Life Theory. **Fisher** focuses on the 7E model for Cultural Humility

and Anti-oppressive Practice. **Jemal and Frasier** describe an elective course in critical social work that uses the Critical Transformative Potential Development Framework.

Other articles provide an in-depth look at specific pedagogical techniques. **Curriel** explores interracial team teaching. **Riquino, Nguyen, Reese, and Molloy** describe the use of a transdiagnostic perspective of the DSM-5 to disrupt white supremacy.

Turning to outcome evaluation, **Copeland and Ross** investigate assessing antiracism as an educational outcome through a systematic review. Although those authors found nothing in previous literature, several of the articles in this issue provide evaluations of instructional approaches designed to dismantle white supremacy. **Fulambarker Buehler, Rogerson, and Gushwa** provide a qualitative exploration of student experiences with race-based caucusing at a predominantly white institution (PWI). **Odera, Wagaman, Staton, and Kemmerer** used collaborative autoethnography to explore a racial justice practice course framed by CRT and liberation theory. **King Keenan, Koza, Mayhew, Saiter-Meyers, Meggett, and Reynolds** identify six core areas of learning following an intersectional experiential activity to address white supremacy, the StarPower Simulation. Finally, **Tillotson, Smith, and Brewer** describe an audit of required readings to assess the race and gender of authors as a tool for assessing bias in the curriculum. Perhaps these articles can serve as the foundation for assessing antiracist outcomes in the future.

Section III—Institutional/Extracurricular Approaches and a Call to the Profession

We begin the final section with a wealth of institutional-level and extracurricular approaches to dismantling white supremacy in social work education. **Bailly, Brumley, Mraz, Morgan, O'Neal, Radis, Wysor Nguema, Keeler, Ocean, and Spencer** describe their experiences forming and reflecting on an Anti-racism working group formed at a PWI. **Polk, Vazquez, Kim, and Green** detail their five-year systematic campaign to move all levels of their social work program from a multicultural orientation to a CRT focus. **Riley, Bewley, Butler-King, Byers, Miller, Dell, and Kendrick** describe the adoption of Undoing Racism Principles in a PWI school of social work.

Calvo and Bradley provide a narrative analysis of a school of social work's adoption of two strategies to deconstruct the hidden nature of whiteness in theories, methods, and practices of education—the Latinx Leadership Institute and the Equity, Justice and Inclusion Initiative. **Albritton, Watkins, De Marco, Przewoznik, and Heil** detail the process of a school of social work re-visioning the way it approaches generalist practice through leadership, strategic planning, and initiatives. **Frey, Mann, Boling, Jordan, Lowe, and Witte** describe the Space for Uprooting Whiteness, where white social work students examine and uproot their relationship to white supremacy and domination.

We end the final section with a set of articles addressing the complicity of the social work profession as a whole in maintaining white supremacy, and calling for changes in the profession. Two articles make the case for centering the experiences and knowledge of BIPOC. **Rangel** considers the characterization of social workers of color as outside agitators when dispelling myths and practices used in and for communities of color. **Stevenson and Blakey** discuss how social work history and anti-Blackness highlight the

need for divesting the profession from systems of social control and anchoring social work in theories articulated by Black people.

Three articles consider the particular role of white women within the profession in upholding white supremacy. **Plummer, Crutchfield, and Steptau-Watson** detail examples of the ways white women, including those in social work, use emotionality, bureaucracy, and the law to control Black bodies. **Aguilar and Counselman-Carpenter** explore challenges to dismantling white supremacy faced by heterocentric white female social workers. **Donohue-Dioh, Wilson, and Leota** call for white social workers to be Woke Disruptors, rather than the liberal enemies described by Malcolm X.

In all, we hope that this special issue will help advance our conversations in social work education around white supremacy and how it influences our practice, research, and education. Recognizing that our *Code of Ethics* calls us to “pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups” (NASW, 2021, para. 21), we believe it is important for social work as a profession to consistently evaluate its own institutions for ways we can practice what we preach. As social work educators, we have the ethical and moral responsibility to learn, grow, and challenge ourselves. We can do better. We must do better (SWCAREs, n.d.)ⁱⁱ.

References

- Almeida, R. V., Werkmeister Rozas, L. M., Cross-Deny, B., Kyeunghae Lee, K., & Yamada, A. M. (2019). Coloniality and intersectionality in social work education and practice. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, 2, 148-164.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10428232.2019.1574195>
- Associated Press. (2020, July 20). Explaining AP style on Black and white. *Associated Press*. <https://apnews.com/article/archive-race-and-ethnicity-9105661462>
- Day, P., & Schiele, J. (2013). *A new history of social welfare* (7th ed.). Pearson.
- EsPoesía. (n.d.). Caminante No Hay Camino: Antonio Machado.
<https://www.espoesia.com/poesia/antonio-machado/caminante-no-hay-camino-antonio-machado/>
- Gray, A. (2019, June 4). The bias of ‘professionalism’ standards. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*.
https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_bias_of_professionalism_standards
- Gregory, J. R. (2020). Social work as a product and project of Whiteness, 1607-1900. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, 32(1), 17-36.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10428232.2020.1730143>
- Lash, D. (2017). *When the welfare people come: Race and class in the US child protection system*. Haymarket Books.
- National Association of Social Workers [NASW]. (2021) *Code of ethics*.
<https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>

Roberts, D. (2008). The racial geography of child welfare: Toward a new paradigm. *Child Welfare*, 87(2), 125-150.

Schiele, J. H. (1997). The contour and meaning of Afrocentric social work. *Journal of Black Studies*, 27(6), 800-819. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002193479702700605>

SWCAREs. (n.d.). Social work coalition for anti-racist educators. <https://www.swcares.org/>

ⁱ From a poem written by Antonio Machado. He worked for the opposition to the dictator Franco in Spain and had to flee the country (EsPoesía, n.d.).

ⁱⁱ Follow SWCAREs on Facebook and Twitter (<https://www.facebook.com/SWCAREs/> and @SWCARES2)