The History and Development of Anti-Racist Practice

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Black History Month:
a Provocation and a Timeline

- ***Black History Month: A Provocation and a Timeline, C Williams & C Bernard (2018) Critical and Radical Social Work, 6 (3) 391-406***

The aim is to highlight watershed moments of the black experience that have contributed to changes in the ideological, political, legal and social contexts of social work education and practice.

Black History Month: a Provocation and a Timeline

The timeline records shifts in the policy and practice focus 1948-2018:

- From the post-war period of assimilation based on a viewing of black lives and experiences as pathological or deficit.

- Through a period of acknowledgement of multicultural diversity in the 1970s.

- To the highly politicised era of anti-racism in the 1980s and 1990s.

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Anti-Racist Approaches to Social Work

- Anti-Racists scholars, researchers and practitioners sought to make visible the ways racial and racist processes manifested in social work.

- Racial discrimination remains deeply embedded in institutions

- Racial practices embedded in institutional practices

Anti-Racist Approaches to Social Work

A number of anti-racist scholars:

- Called attention to the notion that much SW theories and methodologies have been built on Eurocentric paradigms assumptions and understandings.

- Challenged the dominant models of practice (Ahmad, 1990; Aymer, 2002;Dominelli, 1994, Graham, 2000; Keating, 2000).

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Anti-Racist and Black Perspectives

Anti-racist and black perspectives signalled a significant shift in the discourse on oppression in social work practice and education.

Called attention to racial practices and colourblindness in:

- Mental Health; Children in Care; Child Protection; Social Work Education

CCETSW's anti-racist initiative

- CCETSW's anti-racist initiative was influenced by discussions that took place among black and white social work academics and practitioners who were concerned about racism in the field of social work.

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CCETSW's anti-racist initiative

- 1989 CCETSW introduced the Rules and Regulations for the Diploma in Social Work (Paper 30), which made it a compulsory requirement for social work students to address issues of 'race' and racism, and to demonstrate competence in anti-racist practice.

The Demise of Anti-Racist Social Work

Social work education came under attack for being overly concerned with 'political correctness', in particular, for being too narrowly focused on anti-racism and black perspectives (Phillips, 1993; Pinker, 1993).

In the training of social workers there is too much emphasis on what one Conservative minister in the 1990s termed 'isms' and 'ologies' (Lavalette & Penketh, 2014)

The Demise of Anti-Racist Social Work

- Critiques of anti-racist perspectives have pointed to the necessity for a broader conceptualisation of oppression.

- Scholars have argued that an over-emphasis on anti-racism is limited in addressing the complexities surrounding multiple forms of oppression based on gender, class, sexual orientation and abilities (Macey, 1995; Macey and Moxon, 1996; Mullaly, 2002).

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The Demise of Anti-Racist Social Work

- Some noted that the main criticisms levelled at anti-racist perspectives have been that it is seen as reductionist, and offers formulaic approaches, and that categories such as black and black perspectives are poorly defined (Williams, 1999).

The Demise of Anti-Racist Social Work

- The 21st century has seen a noticeable shift in the language and framing of race and anti-racism (Lavalette & Penketh 2014)

- A shift away from what was originally perceived as a radical position, towards narratives that are more muted and couched in terms of diversity and cultural difference(Dominelli, 2008; Graham and Schiele, 2010; Keating; 2000; Lavelette & Penketh, 2014).

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The Demise of Anti-Racist Social Work

- In the current neo-liberal context, a neo-assimilationalist language of diversity and difference has emerged, largely replacing the discourse of anti-racism (Williams & Bernard, 2018)

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The Demise of Anti-Racist Social Work

While some scholars insist that an anti-oppressive framework is the most appropriate one for addressing new tensions created by racial and ethnic diversity, others argue that as racism occurs in more subtle ways, the complex articulation of race is lost in anti-oppression discourse.

Looking Back and Looking Forward

- It is clear that despite many debates about anti-oppressive practice, and the growth in the knowledge base, questions about race still remains under-examined in social work.

- Race and racism has become unsayable and culture has reappeared as the predominant explanatory framework (Williams & Bernard, 2018, p389)

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Looking Back and Looking Forward

In this 'trans-national' yet 'nationalist' turn – in this age of complex migration and diverse racial demographics – what might emerge as the dominant orientation to how we prepare social workers for a sophisticated response?

The challenge for contemporary scholars is to shift the paradigm, to push forward thinking and to re-engage with this historical context and its relevance in formulating new pathways.

Looking Forward

- What are the challenges and opportunities for continuing debates about the language and framings of race and racism in social work education and practice?

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