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Unsettling graduate social work education at DePaul university

Jovan Rivera-Lovato
DePaul University, jriveral@depaul.edu

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Jovan Rumaldo Rivera-Lovato

Department of Women's and Gender Studies

DePaul University

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Table of Contents

Abstract

Social work education and practice have been historically complacent in settler colonialism and, many times, perpetrated acts of settler violence against Native peoples. Thus, it is incumbent on graduate social work education to include curricula related to this topic. This is a master's thesis in Women's and Gender Studies which uses focus groups to explore how the Department of Social Work at DePaul University teaches about settler colonialism, decolonization, and Native peoples. Three themes were identified through focus group discussion: a lack of structural competency wherein students are not taught to treat settler colonialism as a structure which foregrounds social relations in the US, neglect of settler colonial history wherein students are taught minimally about the history of social work as a field and even lesser still about the ways in which early social workers capitalized on their gendered settler subjectivity by perpetrating family separations and attempted assimilation of Native children, and inconsistent practices of land acknowledgement which often do not lead to more meaningful learning or action. This thesis explores students' experiences in these regards and offers recommendations to the department in order to more effectively teach on these critical topics.

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without a network of support which reaches back to my childhood. Unfortunately, I don't have space to thank everyone who deserves it. So, please know that what follows is just the tip of the iceberg which has kept me afloat.

I'd first like to thank the members of my thesis committee: Dr. Maria Ferrera, Dr. Sanjukta Mukherjee, and Roe Bubar, J.D.. Maria, your consistent support for my scholarship and my overall wellness is unparalleled, and I will be eternally grateful for the depth of your care. Sanjukta, your careful teachings, particularly at the very beginning stages of this project, have resulted in a fruitful scholarly endeavor. Roe, whom I've known the longest, you are perhaps the most at fault for the direction of this project and my scholarship overall. You are among an incredibly intelligent and caring team of feminist scholars at Colorado State University who took me under their wings in my undergrad and have continued to hold me to account for our political goals. Thank you for agreeing to bring me back under your mentorship!

I also want to thank the Social Transformation Research Collaborative for supporting me and my scholarship and enabling me to compensate participants for their time and vulnerability. This team includes Dr. Julie Moody Freeman, Dr. Billy Johnson Gonzalez, and Alex Delgadillo.

Thank you to my partner, Jaime "Aer" Muñoz, for celebrating even the smallest goals met and helping me to take things one step at a time. Thank you also to my parents, particularly my dad, Frank Lovato, for teaching me the fundamentals of discipline, celebrating our achievements over the years, taking on debt to support my education, and encouraging me to follow my passion regardless of its focus. You've made me who I am, however nerdy!

It has truly taken a village, as they say, and I strive to make my education and my career as much to your benefit as it is to mine.

Dedication

As I write this dedication, the common refrain amongst Natives “all my relations” comes to mind. I’m not sure if I fully grasp the meaning of this phrase beyond the intellectual exercise of tracing contours of social relations constructed by oppressions like settler colonialism - if I even grasp that. Nevertheless, I engage in this work with the hopes that our relations may yet be healed or transformed, that material redress and #LandBack might be realized within our lifetimes, and that we may be “in good relation,” to borrow another common Native lesson. I engage in this work so that we, particularly those of us who were born to settler communities and act in settler ways, may learn that lesson and begin to unsettle.

Prologue:

A Brief Note About the Author

My mother's family has a lot of stories, as many families do. Perhaps it will come as no surprise that one of those stories includes a great-great grandmother from Navajo Nation. She was "pure" Navajo, according to my mom. I know her name and have several pictures of her which adorn the walls of my apartment to this day. In fact, my mom has taken to sending them to me whenever she comes across one. I appreciate this gesture, as the pictures often include other members of my family, and I know my own life would not be possible without the many contributions of each of those pictured. My dad's side of the family does not have stories such as this but are often locked in speculation about our supposed Native ancestry. Rumors spread about ancient connections to the Blackfeet, Apache, and others. All the while we have thought of ourselves as Chicano, and, in recent years, I've taken to spelling it in the Indigenous way with an "X" instead of a "C" as in Xicanx (adding an x at the end as well to challenge binary gendered signification).

While it is very likely that these ancestral connections have some merit, it can be difficult to understand their significance and implications for contemporary life. In my scrambling efforts to suss this out, I exaggerated my relations to Native peoples and began to claim Diné (Navajo) identity myself. To me, it did not matter that I was not Tribally enrolled or that I did not have the lived experience of having understood myself as Native for my entire life or any meaningful connections with the Tribe and its citizens.. I was not a child separated from my community nor was I the child of parents or grandparents who were. Rather, I was separated from "my" community through decades of colonization. It seemed to me that I was the victim of a long,

slow process of family separation which a claim to Native identity and belonging could help remedy.

Little did I realize that I had entered the game of "playing Indian," which settlers have been practicing for years. It is through playing this game that settlers further construct themselves as settlers, in fact, so my actions become painfully ironic when viewed through this lens. It was through Chicana and Native feminist theories that I began this journey through pretendianism, as it is often called. While they emphasized the importance of unpacking one's experiences of colonization in order to illuminate a way forward, I did not yet comprehend the settler colonial structure. Consequently, I confused colonizations, conflated Indigenous subjectivities, ignored my family's history of settlement, and only further perpetrated settler colonization in my attempts to "decolonize."

This realization was quite painful, indeed. Because I do not speak Spanish, do not listen to music coming from Mexico or other areas of so-called Latin America, and I have had a multi-racial group of friends throughout my life, I have never quite felt a sense of community amongst other Xicanxs or Latinxs. This was, I believe, my primary motivator for pretending to be Native. I was attempting to find a sense of belonging through theft and occupation which simultaneously relieved me of any guilt associated with white (settler) family history, and quite conveniently so.

It was through the settler colonial structure that I was empowered to reflect critically on my relationship with other Xicanx and with Native peoples. I began to realize all the foolish mistakes that I had made and all the ways in which my behavior was harmful to Native peoples. Thus, it is through my own experience of self-reflexivity that I have come to know the efficacy of the settler colonial structure for analyzing social problems and devising creative and radical

solutions for them. It did not take long for me to discover its effectiveness when applied to myself as a social worker as well. With the help of Roe Bubar (who is on this thesis committee) and many others, I have come to study settler colonialism and our situatedness therein and to push the entities which I am connected with to do the same.

To that end, I take the critique of Kim Tallbear, who warns that non-Native peoples who pretend to be Native represent a structural threat to Tribal sovereignty and are often elevated as thought leaders with regard to working with Native communities, to heart.[1] In completing this masters thesis, I do not wish to position myself as a leader. Rather, I hope that my readers will understand me as the student of thought leaders who are themselves Native and who have been producing scholarship and practicing in the field for years prior to this intervention. I also hope that, in reading this work, they too become students of these leaders and we may all begin the longer and perhaps more difficult work of working together across differences toward a truly decolonized future.

[1] Kim Tallbear, "Playing Indian Constitutes a Structural Form of Colonial Theft, and It Must be Tackled," Unsettle, Substack, May 10, 2021, https://kimtallbear.substack.com/p/playing-indian-constitutes-a-structural.

The field of social work is dedicated to helping people, addressing social problems, and challenging social injustice.[2] Nonetheless, social workers are often the wielders and abusers of power over others. A reflection on the history of the field reveals that it/we have often been the perpetrators of violence against marginalized communities.[3] In their book "Decolonizing Pathways Towards Integrative Healing in Social Work," Kris Clarke and Michael Yellow Bird argue that social work developed "in step with settler colonial nation-building projects in the late nineteenth century. Its aim has been - paradoxically - to challenge state policies and advocate for social justice while supporting and operating with oppressive colonizing structures."[4]

As a social worker, I have often felt awkwardly positioned between the values espoused by the field because they seem to run contrary to its history of its practice. I began to recognize and think critically about these apparent contradictions in social work during my undergraduate studies. While pursuing a Bachelor of Social Work, I also sought degrees in Women's and Gender Studies and Ethnic Studies. While my interest in the latter two fields of study was born out of my experience in sexual violence prevention, my understanding of social structures quickly grew to see how patriarchy was connected to heterosexism, capitalism, neoliberalism, imperialism, and settler colonialism.

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[2] National Association of Social Workers. "Read the Code of Ethics," Socialworkers, National Association of Social Workers, accessed September 26, 2022, https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English.

[3] Kris Clarke and Michael Yellow Bird, Decolonizing Pathways Toward Integrative Healing In Social Work (New York: Routledge, 2021), 2. Jennifer Maree Haley, "Intersectional and Relational Frameworks: Confronting Anti-Blackness, Settler Colonialism, and Neoliberalism in U.S. Social Work," *Journal of Progressive Human Services* 31, no. 3 (2020): 210-225. Katie Johnston-Goodstar, "Youth Participatory Action Research: Re-visioning Social Justice for Social Work with Indigenous Youths," *Social Work* 58, no. 4 (2013): 314-320. Janet L. Finn, "Looking Back," in *Just Practice: A Social Justice Approach to Social Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 63-104.

[4] Clarke and Yellow Bird, 2.

Women's and Gender Studies and Ethnic Studies have not only helped me to think more critically about social work as a field, but also to scrutinize my own positionality. It was in these programs where I began to learn about the United States' history of genocide and slavery in ernest for the first time and reflect on their impact on my life. The way my family talked about themselves, why we went to the church we did, why we talked about our Indigenous ancestors in a fetishizing way. I was coming to consciousness around my own social position, and the coloniality of white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism became extremely personal. Consequently, I have become increasingly interested in Women of Color feminisms and Native feminist theories.

Theorizing settler colonialism has allowed me to understand other structures of oppression and my own positionality therein most effectively. The use of the settler colonial framework also leads to many new and radical solutions to social problems which I find to be urgently needed in the field of social work. Social work and social work practitioners are undeniably implicated in the perpetration of settler colonialism through our collaborations with the settler-state and our deployment of settler epistemologies, pedagogies, and interventions.[5] The Council on Social Work Education has made significant efforts to bolster their requirements regarding anti-racism in recent years. In fact, in 2015, "tribal sovereign status" was added as required in curricula for programs seeking accreditation and was included again in the 2022 standards.[6] Nevertheless, in my experience, social work was woefully inadequate in educating about and addressing these structures in complex ways. My lessons were largely restricted to the individual: how the individual develops, problems that the individual experiences, behavioral

[5] Clarke and Yellow Bird; 23-46, 70-85. Haley, 215-217.

[6] Council on Social Work Education, "Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards for Baccalaureate and Master's Social Work Programs," CSWE, Council on Social Work Education, https://www.cswe.org/accreditation/standards/2022-epas/.

changes that the individual can make to avoid these problems. Despite the use of ecosystems theory as the foundation of social work's "person-in-environment" approach, the context in which an individual experiences life was neglected in favor of the individual experience itself.[7]

The study that follows was born of an urgency to know whether or not my experience in social work education was shared by my peers. Urgency not just to pacify my own inner turmoil, but to create and support the change that is so desperately needed in the field. Thus, my research questions include: 1) How are graduate social work students implicated in and/or impacted by settler colonialism in graduate education? 2) How do graduate social work students learn about settler colonialism? 3) In what ways is settler colonialism taught or included within graduate social work education? 4) How are Native peoples' social and material experiences taught or included within graduate social work education?

As a student in the Department of Social Work at DePaul University in Chicago, it is incumbent upon me to turn towards my position, education, and my peers here to answer these questions. Indeed there are graduate social work students all over the country and around the world, and I have heard similar questions arise from colleagues in programs with which I am not familiar. As I benefit from the occupation of Land by the city of Chicago and by DePaul University, however, I feel the responsibility of specificity to place. My education is happening here, I am a practicing social worker here, and my peers and I will likely continue to practice in this city and the surrounding area after we graduate. Thus, I must focus on the particularities of our experiences at DePaul in hopes that we might offer sincere reflections on our education. Consequently, my thesis is a qualitative research study that uses focus groups to explore how the Department of Social Work at DePaul University teaches about settler colonialism, decolonization, and Native peoples.

[7] Haley, 211.

Theoretical Framework

There is a growing body of literature regarding social work's role in colonialisms around the world. Scholars and activists contributing to this body offer illuminating perspectives and critiques which are vital to any individual social work practitioner or program hoping to challenge social injustice and depart from the settler status quo. This section explores this literature in order to establish a framework of settler colonialism with which to assess how and what graduate students learn in the Department of Social Work at DePaul University.

Indigenous Social Work

The primary example of social workers' attempts to develop a framework which takes seriously the role of the field in colonialisms is Indigenous Social Work. Articulated mainly in the anthologies "Indigenous Social Work around the World: Towards Culturally Relevant Education and Practice," edited by Mel Gray, John Coates, and Michael Yellow Bird,[8] and in the second edition entitled "Decolonization Social Work," with Tiani Hetherington as an added editor,[9] Indigenous Social Work is the most impactful intervention regarding colonialism in the field in the last decade.

The core of Indigenous Social Work's critique is that "social work was formed on a foundation of colonization and exclusion of the well-being of Indigenous Peoples and is, therefore, not significantly different in its assumptions and protections of the colonial status quo than other mainstream organizations or institutions that maintain the interests of the colonial state."[10] They further argue that the field has focused on developing education and practice based

[8] Mel Gray, John Coates, and Michael Yellow Bird, *Indigenous Social Work around the World: Towards Culturally Relevant Education and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2008).

[9] Mel Gray, John Coates, Michael Yellow Bird, and Tiani Hetherington, *Decolonizing Social Work* (London: Routledge, 2013).

[10] Gray, Coates, and Yellow Bird, 65.

on Western values such as professionalism, rationalism, and reflective individualism before attempting to adapt them to address problems which arise in Indigenous communities throughout the world.[11] In doing so, social work has constructed a system supporting the idea that the West is best and the rest need to be more like them in order to solve their problems.

By contrast, "Indigenous social work is deliberately political and framed within the discourse of human rights and social justice with contemporary manifestations marked by the ever present memory of Indigenous Peoples' unjust treatment under colonialism."[12] Thus, Indigenous Social Work holds that "knowledge should arise from within the culture, reflect local behaviors and practices, be interpreted within a local frame of reference, and thus be locally relevant".[13] It insists on the efficacy of grassroots efforts, value of Indigenous knowledge systems, and is critical of transnational systems which oppress Indigenous peoples in all areas of the world. It promotes self-determination by advocating that social workers rely on the knowledges, strengths, and methods used by the communities themselves rather than relying on adapting external interventions.

Indigenous Social Work is an urgently needed step towards addressing colonialism within the field. However, as the title of the first edition suggests, the editors and contributors touch on colonialisms around the world; thus, they theorize about multiple types of colonialisms producing multiple types of Indigenous subjectivities. As the focus of this study is on the Department of Social Work at DePaul University and about social work education as it happens in this US-based entity, it is important to consider the specific type of colonization which structures US society.

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[11] Gray, Coates, and Yellow Bird, 3.

[12] Gray, Coates, and Yellow Bird, 50.

[13] Gray, Coates, Yellow Bird, and Hetherington, 27.

Native Feminist Theories

For me, the most efficacious body of literature for understanding the specificity of colonialism in the US are Native feminist theories. In their piece "Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections Between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy," Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill define Native feminist theories "as those theories that make substantial advances in understandings of the connections between settler colonialism and both heteropatriarchy and heteropaternalism. Native feminist theories focus on compound issues of gender, sexuality, race, indigeneity, and nation."[14] This body of literature is helpful not only in understanding settler colonialism as a defining structure of the US but also in helping us to deepen the analysis by looking at the interactions of settler colonialism with other structures of oppression.

Settler Colonialism

Settler colonialism is distinct from other types of colonialisms for a number of reasons, including the intentions with which settlers embark on their efforts and the spatial difference between the colonial entity, Indigenous peoples, and the land.[15] Settlers are intent on making a new home in the areas they colonize; thus, there is no space between the colonizing entity, the Indigenous peoples whom they displace by establishing their new home, and the land from which they extract resources. Native people(s) are constantly moving within the US and many Native Nations are spatially enveloped by US-occupied territory.

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[14] Maile Arvil, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill, "Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy," Feminist Foundations 25, no. 1 (2013): 11.

[15] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006). Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is not a metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity,Education, & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 5-7.

The persistence of Native peoples and nations is not essential to the settler-state, however. Indeed, the existence of Native peoples *as peoples* and nations is a direct threat to the settler-state. In his seminal piece "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native," Patrick Wolfe defines settler colonialism as a structure predicated on the logic of elimination of Native peoples in order to gain access to territory.[16] Within such a structure, Native peoples pose a problem for the settler-state because they make complete and total occupation impossible. They are a reminder of the brutal tactics used to settle and are constantly challenging the settler-state's legal and moral authority to occupy land through their efforts to organize and resist further colonial projects.

Wolfe emphasizes that settler colonialism is a complex structure and is continuous through time.[17] Therefore, efforts to eliminate Native peoples are not limited to one particular era of a settler-state's history. In the US, these efforts have been defined by war, removal from ancestral homelands, restriction to reservations, allotment of collective land into privately owned plots, family separation and assimilation via boarding schools and the foster care system, and the termination of federal recognition and trust responsibility for some Tribes. One contemporary example includes challenges to the Indian Child Welfare Act which threaten to undermine the relationship between the US federal government and Native nations, the political distinction of Tribal membership, and absorb Native peoples into the multicultural array of different racial groups in the broader US are currently being reviewed by the US Supreme Court. So, attempts at elimination continue through today.

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[16] Wolfe, 388.

[17] Wolfe, 390.

Wolfe further emphasized that "the primary motive for the logic of elimination is not race but access to territory. Territoriality is settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element."[18] Thus, in settler colonialism, human relationships with land are restricted to an individual and his property.[19] Historically, this has allowed settlers to own the means of production and leverage those means for the accumulation of wealth, sometimes over many generations. Some settlers have also presumed ownership over other humans and compounded their profit potential through the mechanism of chattel slavery.[20] Thus, settler colonialism shares a relationship with racial capitalism.

Native feminist theories emphasize the relationship of settler colonialism to heteropatriarchy and posit that settler colonialism is also gendered.[21] Settlers have attempted to naturalize hierarchy by imposing a system wherein only two genders exist and one dominates the other.[22] The treaty making process between Native Nations and the US was often characterized by a refusal of settlers to recognize the decision-making powers of non-men in Tribal affairs. Land ownership has also been the privilege of men in settler society; therefore, when Tribal lands were allotted into individual plots, non-men were often barred from being recognized as

[18] Wolfe, 388.

[19] Tuck and Yang, 5.

[20] Tuck and Yang, 6. Andrea Smith, "Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy: Rethinking Women of Color Organizing." In *Feminist Theory Reader*, edited by Carole McCann, Seung-kyung Kim, and Emek Ergun, (New York and London: Routledge, 2020): 142. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Not "A Nation of Immigrants": Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy, and a History of Erasure and Exclusion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2021), 51-82.

[21] Arvil, Tuck, and Morrill; Maria Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (2010): 742-759; Smith, 146-147.

[22] Arvil, Tuck, and Morrill; Lugones, 743-745. Smith 146-147. Clarke and Yellow Bird, 39. Mishuana Goeman and Jennifer Nez Denetdale, "Guest Editors' Introduction: Native feminisms: Legacies, interventions, and Indigenous sovereignties," *Wicazo Sa Review* 24, no. 2 (2009): 9-13.

potential land owners. Thus, as Arvil, Tuck, and Morrill argue, "the enforcement of 'proper' gender roles is entangled in settler nations' attempts to limit and manage Indigenous peoples' claims to land."[23]

Decolonization

In addressing the connections between settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and heteropatriarchy, Arvil, Tuck, and Morrill posit that "the issues facing Indigenous women, as inseparable from the issues facing Indigenous peoples as a whole, are resolved in decolonization and sovereignty."[24] Decolonization, however, has been subject to concept fragmentation resulting in the need to clarify its precise meaning.

Scholars of Indigenous Social Work argue that decolonization "can be seen as a continuation of social work's advocacy on social justice and of progressive elements within the profession that challenge hegemonic forms of practice."[25] They state that decolonization in the field involves acknowledging its complicity and ceasing its participation in colonial projects, acknowledging and incorporating the strengths of Indigenous communities, and crediting the strengths and contributions of Indigenous knowledges, traditions, and practices.[26]

In their piece "Decolonization is not a metaphor," Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang offer a definition of decolonization that is specific in its nature and scope as well as particular to the settler colonial structure. Tuck and Yang begin by clarifying the particularities of settler colonialism in contrast with other types of colonialism. In doing so, they highlight that decolonization may very well have multiple meanings depending on the colonial context.

[23] Arvil, Tuck, and Morrill; 15.

[24] Arvil, Tuck, and Morrill; 11.

[25] Gray, Coates, Yellow Bird, and Hetherington, 1.

[26] Gray, Coates, Yellow Bird, and Hetherington, 7.

Nevertheless, they argue, in the US decolonization has become a metaphor vaguely alluding to any social justice effort. Learning about oppression or colonization becomes "decolonizing your mind," including readings about oppression or colonization in your course reading list becomes "decolonizing your syllabus," and so on. By using decolonization in this way, we lose its political significance and potential as a tool for organizing. We also render it less particular to the structure of settler colonialism and increasingly difficult to understand. Instead, Tuck and Yang insist that "decolonization in the settler colonial context must involve the repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted; that is, all of the land, and not just symbolically."[27] In other words, because settler colonialism is primarily about eliminating Native peoples in order to gain access to territory, decolonization must mean nothing short of giving all the land occupied by the settler-state back to Native peoples.

This definition of decolonization is both ideological and material in nature, distinct from other definitions of decolonization arising from different colonial contexts, and incommensurable with social justice efforts. Tuck and Yang further elaborate:

> Decolonization "here" is intimately connected to anti-imperialism elsewhere. However, decolonial struggles here/there are not parallel, not shared equally, nor do they bring neat closure to the concerns of all involved - particularly not for settlers. Decolonization is not equivocal to other anti-colonial struggles. It is incommensurable.[28]

Whereas social justice movements are largely premised on recognition of individual rights and protections under settler-state law, such as civil rights for people of color, decolonization challenges the moral and legal authority of the settler-state to occupy the land it currently

[27] Tuck and Yang, 7.

[28] Tuck and Yang, 31.

occupies and undermines the foundation of its existence. Rather than seeking recognition under settler-state law, decolonization involves asserting the sovereignty of Native nations and building their capacity to develop and enforce their own laws over their own Tribal members and lands. This includes the return of land which was coercively taken by the US federal government initially and return of land in light of the US's failure to fulfill the terms of the treaties with Native nations. With this in mind, many Native peoples have organized in support of Tribal sovereignty and under the banner of "Land Back."

Incommensurability is, thus, unsettling. By this, Tuck and Yang mean that analyses engaging a settler colonial framework "destabilize, un-balance, and repatriate the very terms and assumptions of some of the most radical efforts to reimagine human power relations." Thus, the title of this project is "unsettling" graduate social work education rather than indigenizing or decolonizing it. The attempt here is to disrupt graduate social work education's complacency in supporting the settler colonial structure and move towards what may be the first and smallest steps toward support for movement(s) for decolonization. Tuck and Yang further state that opportunities for solidarity across both individual differences and across movements for different political goals, such as transnational decolonizations, abolition, and critical pedagogies, "lie in what is incommensurable rather than what is common across these efforts." [29] Thus, by practicing an ethic of incommensurability, social work may yet realize pathways towards a more just, equitable, and decolonized future.

Reflecting on both Indigenous Social Work and citing Tuck and Yang's seminole piece, Kris Clarke and Michael Yellow Bird argue that decolonizing social work

> starts from the recognition that Indigenous peoples have been the subjects (and victims) of the colonizing activities of settler structures and processes and that the goals of settler

[29] Tuck and Yang, 28.

> colonialism have included the elimination, manipulation, control, and replacement of the Native. Decolonization concerns the 'repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools.' Decolonizing social work, therefore, is not about advancing or employing settler social work approaches. Second, mainstream social work must acknowledge the limitations of Western knowing and imperialist models of practice that have damaged Indigenous Peoples and other communities. Finally, it must actively engage with and repair the damage done by the many years of complicity with settler colonial domination.[30]

Context

Exploring how the Department of Social Work at DePaul University requires that we understand the department's genesis and development. The department is located in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences. In 2005, it grew as an offshoot of the Sociology department into an independent Masters of Social Work program and conferred its first cohort of MSW degrees in 2008.[31] According to its website, "the MSW program was granted full, initial accreditation by the Council on Social Work Education's Council on Accreditation in February of 2011. Accreditation was approved until 2015. At its February 2015 meeting, the Council on Accreditation reaffirmed accreditation, granting the program continued accreditation to 2023".[32] The department's mission states that it

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[30] Clarke and Yellow Bird, 42. Tuck and Yang, 1. Gray, Coates, Yellow Bird, and Hetherington, 6.

[31] "Graduate Programs," Social Work, accessed March 3, 2023. https://las.depaul.edu/academics/social-work/graduate/Pages/default.aspx.

[32] "Accreditation," Social Work, accessed October 12, 2021. https://las.depaul.edu/academics/social-work/about/Pages/accreditation.aspx

> extends the university's global Vincentian mission of service to marginalized groups, particularly those in the Chicago urban community. The program offers rigorous, personalized, and responsive education, through collaboration with university and community partners in pursuit of social and economic justice. The DePaul University Master of Social Work Program is designed to foster excellence in community-based practice with an emphasis on ethics, leadership, and scholarship.[33]

Furthermore, the department's values are stated as: providing a context which is supportive of rigorous study and scholarship that directly informs integrative practice, extending the Vincentian identity to provide a learning and organizational context which is appreciative of human diversity and facilitative of social and economic justice, collaborating with other units within the university and with community partners to improve the welfare of historically oppressed populations and communities, and providing professional education in ethical community-based practice with individuals, family groups, community organizations, and institutions.[34]

Education happens through a combination of coursework and hands-on field work. The department uses a cohort model wherein students complete coursework in step with their peers. Field work is considered the signature pedagogy of social work education and students are required to complete two internships under the supervision of an experienced social worker. Thus, stakeholders of the department not only include students, faculty, and staff but also community partners who serve as host organizations, supervisors, and collaborators with students in their capacity as interns.

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[33] "About," Social Work. Accessed October 12, 2021. https://las.depaul.edu/academics/social-work/about/Pages/default.aspx

[34] "About," Social Work. Accessed October 12, 2021. https://las.depaul.edu/academics/social-work/about/Pages/default.aspx

DePaul does not offer a bachelors program but is not the only program in the immediate area conferring MSW degrees. According to the US News & World Report, DePaul's MSW program is listed as number 94 in the country as of 2022.[35] Loyola University's School of Social Work, on the other hand, is number 28 and University of Illinois's Jane Addams College of Social Work is number 21. The University of Chicago's Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice is ranked number 2 in the country.[36]

Despite the competitive field, there are several elements of social work education at DePaul that make it unique. Firstly, students in the program have the opportunity to supplement their education with coursework from other departments. Graduate certificates are available to MSW students in Global Health, Social Research, and Critical Ethnic Studies. DePaul also offers the dual masters degree program with the department of Women's and Gender Studies. Secondly, the department offers two concentrations: forensic social work and community practice. Community practice is of particular significance because DePaul is the only university offering an MSW concentration of this kind in the Chicago area.

Methods

This qualitative research study used focus groups to explore the experiences of current students in the Department of Social Work at DePaul University. The purpose of this study has been to evaluate how the department teaches about settler colonialism, decolonization, and Native peoples. Further, this study aims to affirm the relevance and urgency of scholarship done in the fields of Indigenous Social Work and Native Feminist theories to social work education in what is currently known as the city of Chicago, specifically at DePaul University. This study will

[35] "*Best Schools for Social Work*," US News & World Report, accessed February 11, 2023. from https://www.usnews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-health-schools/social-work-rankings

[36]"*Best Schools for Social Work*," US News & World Report, accessed February 11, 2023. from https://www.usnews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-health-schools/social-work-rankings

contribute to the growth of the Department of Social Work at DePaul and nurture the capacity of the department and faculty therein to teach about these imperative topics.

Sampling

Eligibility for participation was defined simply as being a currently enrolled student in the Department of Social Work's MSW program at DePaul University. Prospective students who had not begun their graduate studies during the time that this project was conducted and alumni of the MSW program or other former students of the Department of Social Work were excluded from participating. The Chair of the department provided the initial call for participants via email to the entire student body. I was given the opportunity by individual faculty members to present a brief in-person invitation to their classes. Lastly, during a department-wide seminar, which was required for all MSW students, the Chair of the department invited me to present the invitation to a mixed in-person and virtual student body.

Interested students were directed to follow up with me directly via email. Once notified of a student's interest in participating, they were provided with an Informed Consent form via email and asked to schedule a one-on-one meeting to discuss the contents therein. A total of eight students expressed interest in participating in the study. Six students met one-on-one with me and signed an Informed Consent form. Ultimately, four students participated in the focus groups. Two participants were in their first year of the program, one participant was in their second year, and the last participant in their third year. Two participants were part-time and two were full time. One student was in the dual degree program with Women's and Gender Studies. No participant identified as Native or was Tribally enrolled. All four students participated in all four focus groups.

Each student was compensated with a $20 gift card to Jewel-Osco. This project was reviewed through DePaul's Institutional Review Board and received approval on June 1, 2022. The protocol ID number is IRB-2022-617. This project was funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation via the Social Transformation Research Collaborative (STRC) at DePaul University. The STRC "champions interdisciplinary research in literature and language, history and culture, to demonstrate how the humanities deepen our understanding of ourselves and our society, empower us to act ethically and responsibly, counter racism, dismantle violence, and build a more just and equitable society."[37] The STRC Graduate Research Fellowship 2022-2023 theme was "Influencers of Racial and Social Justice," which supported projects that explored ways to become such individuals. As the primary researcher, I received $6,000 from July to December of 2022 via student employee payroll. I was also reimbursed a total of $726.46 for supplies, including gift cards for participants, a keyboard and mouse, a standing desk, an audio recording device, and six books for the literature review.

Methodology

Focus groups are particular types of group interviews where the moderator "asks a set of questions designed to elicit collective views about a specific topic."[38] This study used a semistructured design wherein questions were curated to be flexible and responsive to the discussion. In other words, questions were written with the intent that the moderator would be

[37]Social Transformation Research Collaborative, "The Humanities of Healing and Restoration: A Social Transformation Research Collaborative," (presentation, DePaul University, Chicago, IL, October, 2021).

[38] Andrea Fontana and James H. Frey, "The interview: From Neutral Stance to Political Involvement," In *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research,* 3rd Edition, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2005) 695–728.; Robert K. Merton and Patricia L. Kendall, "The Focused Interview," *American Journal of Sociology* 51, no. 6 (1946): 541–557. Katherine E. Ryan, Tysza Gandha, Michael J. Culbertson, and Crystal Carlson, "Focus Group Evidence: Implications for Design and Analysis," *American Journal of Evaluation* 35, no. 3 (2013): 328-345.

required to adjust questions to focus on a variety of topics depending on what was most relevant for the participants of the study. Focus group questions were as follows:

1. Focus Group I
    a. Why were you interested in participating in this particular project?
    b. Do you feel, in the department, you've been taught about the history of social work as a field?
    c. Do you remember what the professor's rationale was for speaking/declining to speak more about it?
    d. Would you say it was a "take that as you will" sort of scenario, not taking a particular perspective?
2. Focus Group II
    a. Reflect on how the department has taught about the history of Chicago, of DePaul University, and of the field of social work. How have you been taught about their significance?
    b. Speak on example(s) when the department has taught about settler colonialism, decolonization, and/or Native peoples. How was it taught and in what context?
    c. Speak a bit more on your experience related to Land Acknowledgements.
    d. Speak more on which classes had follow up discussions on the Land Acknowledgement and did you feel it was helpful? How so?
3. Focus Group III
    a. Any times when faculty have touched on the topics of settler colonialism, decolonization, and Native peoples?

   b. Have any of these discussions made ties specifically to settler colonialism or decolonization? Have these discussions defined these concepts?
   c. Have you experienced any discussions of land dispossession or genocide? Land Back?
   d. How has the department taught you about intersectionality (and connections to settler colonialism)?

4. Focus Group IV
   a. Have professors required you to read the articles related to Land Acknowledgements?
   b. What were your main takeaways from the articles? Were they helpful in regard to social work practice?
   c. Is there literature or focus areas that you think would be (more) helpful related to the Land Acknowledgements in MSW syllabi?
   d. What are your recommendations for the department to begin/improve upon how they teach about settler colonialism, decolonization, and Native peoples?

This study also utilized a virtual Talking Piece as a tool to facilitate discussion. Talking Pieces are commonly used in Restorative and Transformative Justice practices, such as Talking Circles and Peace Circles, but have their origins in Indigenous practices throughout the world. Talking pieces are typically a physical item which is passed from one participant to another in sequential order. While an individual holds the talking piece, other participants agree to honor their time to speak and, while they may offer non-verbal affirmations such as a snap, gesture, or grunt, they agree not to speak until they themselves have the Talking Piece. A virtual Talking Piece involves a verbal pass from one participant to another rather than a physical one. When

one is finished speaking, they state "I'll pass it to. . ." and the next person has leave to speak thereafter. Sequence was determined at the very beginning of each focus group and varied from group to group. Throughout one discussion, the sequence remained the same so that each student would pass to the same person each time, simulating a Talking Circle.

The intent of a Talking Piece is to provide the opportunity for each participant to respond to each question. In critiquing a case at Fresno State, wherein social work faculty failed to appropriately address undergraduate student concerns regarding the program's admissions process, Clarke and Yellow Bird assert that

> The use of an Indigenous communication tool such as the talking stick, in which each participant has an equal opportunity to speak, could have provided an opportunity to reduce the hierarchy of voices, open up silence, and enhance connection with all of the parties involved. Such a technique could have provided a creative platform to engage with one another to create a new vision of the purpose and goals of the social work program. By remaining within the comfort of the neutral professional paradigm, however, the institutional actors missed the chance for transformative dialogue and resolution.[39]

A virtual Talking Piece was used in this study in order to do just as Clarke and Yellow Bird suggest: reduce the hierarchy of voices, open up silence, and enhance connection with all of the parties involved. Participants were all afforded the opportunity to reflect on their experiences within the department and respond to each question that was asked. As the primary investigator and facilitator of the focus group, I also adhered to these agreements and used the Talking Piece in the same manner as all participants.

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[39] Clarke and Yellow Bird, 72.

Data Analysis

Video recordings, audio recordings, transcripts, and chat transcripts of each focus group were produced using the Zoom recording functions. Video recordings were reviewed and transcripts were edited by me in order to ensure accuracy. Data was reviewed line-by-line to identify comments of significance. Comments were then organized into initial themes, including: students' implication, desire to learn, neglect of history, peer knowledge and education, neglect of social systems, neglect of settler colonialism, examples of settler colonialism education, land acknowledgement, and recommendations. Data was compared with data in order to refine themes into chapters. Chapter themes include lack of structural competency, neglect of settler colonial history, practicing Land Acknowledgement, and recommendations.

Limitations

There are four major limitations to this study. Firstly, a smaller sample size led to more narrow reflections on experiences in the department. A larger sample, particularly with more numbers of students in their second year or beyond, may have yielded more reflections and illuminated experiences or patterns not identified by this sample.

Secondly, this study lacks reflections and experiences of Native students. None of the participants nor I, as the primary researcher, identified as Native or were enrolled members of a Tribe. As such, the research design and data are from a distinctly non-Native standpoint. Having Native students as participants and/or researchers likely would have added perspectives to the study that are easily lost or neglected by those of us who do not share those social positions, political designations, and lived experiences.

Thirdly, this study includes an analysis of students' situatedness in settler colonialism by way of their status as graduate social work students at DePaul. Reflections shared during focus

groups illuminated that the participants were/are also situated as individuals with their own unique social positions and lived experiences, of which being a student is only a part. Students, faculty, and staff in the Department of Social Work would likely benefit from an exploration of their individual positions within the settler colonial structure and further research into how this may or may not be facilitated within the department is needed.

Lastly, data revealed that graduate social work education may be lacking in structural competency related to systems other than settler colonialism, such as racial capitalism, neoliberalism, imperialism, and heteropatriarchy. Further research is required to assess how the department teaches about these structures and their connection to one another.

Chapter I:

Lack of Structural Competency

As discussed in the theoretical framework section, settler colonialism is a structure, not an event. Thinking structurally means shifting one's perspective toward the macro and scrutinizing how a society's constraints and opportunities are determined systematically.[40] Thinking structurally means individuals themselves, including our unique personalities, characteristics, preferences, abilities, and attributes are less important than the context in which individuals enact their uniqueness. In other words, structures are the environment in which human behavior takes place and should be held in higher analytical value than the behavior itself. Significantly, structure defines the nature and scope of one's relationships to and interactions with others. Each individual is situated within structures that privilege some at the expense, either directly or indirectly, of others. Structure illuminates social positions (how we are situated in structures) and social relations (how we are connected with one another through structures). This chapter explores students' experiences being taught about the structural nature of settler colonialism and advocates for teaching structural competency in graduate social work education through frameworks such as intersectionality.

Settler colonialism is defined by efforts to eliminate Native peoples in order to allow settlers to access land.[41] As a structure, it is continuous throughout time and not restricted to a particular era; thus, it has and continues to define social relations within the US. War, forced removal, restriction to reservations, allotment, family separation, assimilation, relocation, and termination have all been included in settler attempts to eliminate the so-called "Indian

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[40] Iris Marion Young, "Structure as the Subject of Justice," in *Responsibility for Justice*, (New York, Oxford University Press: 2011), 55.

[41] Wolfe, 388.

problem."[42] Each of these efforts have been developed and/or supported by a network of individual actors (sometimes knowingly and sometimes unknowingly), organizations, and policies. For example, residents of Chicago can enjoy museum campus, Lake Shore Drive, and the river walk due to recent legal decisions having been made in rulings against the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi which deny their authority over unceded land.[43] This decision was made in US courts using a US legal system which requires significant time, energy, and money to effectively participate in. Organizations who rent or own space within that land bring in individuals who peruse and enjoy the land daily. While they may not be aware of it, their continued presence maintains a social norm wherein the land is vulnerable to tourists and residents who have access to it at their leisure. So, their individual actions are enabled by policy which is enforced by the settler state which is itself the ultimate beneficiary of displacement. Thus, the issue is not just one of individuals and their behaviors, but it is an entire structure which makes these behaviors possible at the expense of Tribes.

Current efforts to undermine ICWA, via *Brackeen v. Haaland*, not only seek to facilitate non-Native access to Native children but also threaten to dissolve the foundation of Tribal sovereignty altogether. On the one hand, this case which is in front of the supreme court is informed by a misunderstanding of Tribal sovereignty and political belonging. Opponents of ICWA argue that it is a race-based law which disenfranchises non-Native families, whereas Tribes emphasize that the law is based on political designation as a Tribal citizen and not on

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[42] Dunbar-Ortiz, 18-50. Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Settler Colonialism as Structure: A Framework for Comparative Studies of U.S. Race and Gender Formation," *Current (and Future) Theoretical Debates in Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1, no. 1. (2015): 55-58.

[43] John N. Low, *Imprints: The Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians and the City of Chicago,* (Michigan, Michigan State university Press: 2016): 67-94.

race.[44] On another hand, it threatens to open the floodgates to family separation and attempted assimilation of Native children through placements with non-Native families. On yet another hand, families who are looking to adopt may participate in this colonial practice by simply fulfilling their dreams of adopting a child. So, their behavior would be enabled by an ideology of race which neglects and misunderstands the significance of Tribal citizenship, policy changes which are decided by non-Natives in a distinctly US legal system, and result in the further elimination of Native peoples. Therefore, a structural analysis is required to situate individual actors, better understand their perspective on the matter, and collaborate on creative solutions for the challenges they face.

For another example we might look to property ownership. Wolfe argues that land is considered property for individuals to own under settler colonialism.[45] Collective, Tribal ownership of land has been challenged several times with the most prominent example being the Dawes Act (or Indian General Allotment Act) of 1887. This Act broke Tribal lands up into individual allotments under the private ownership of individual Tribal members. Allotments which were left without an assigned Tribal owner were considered surplus by the federal government and made available for non-Natives to purchase. The intended effect was twofold: firstly, to disrupt Native concepts of collective ownership and impart an ethic of individualism and, secondly, to physically disrupt the connection between Tribal members by introducing an influx of non-Native residents.[46] Property ownership is the number one way to accumulate

[44]Alexandra Payan, "ICWA's Constitutionality Challenged and Review by the Supreme Court Underway," *National Council on Urban Indian Health*, March 11, 2022, https://ncuih.org/2022/03/11/icwas-constitutionality-challenged-and-review-by-the-supreme-court-underway/.

[45] Wolfe, 388.

[46] "Dawes Act (1887)," National Archives, February 8, 2022, https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/dawes-act.

wealth in the US, so it may come as no surprise that non-Natives took advantage of this opportunity. Some people have had the opportunity to accumulate wealth or simply cherished memories through property ownership via the Dawes Act. Sometimes this happens in one family, over multiple generations, but it is always at the expense of Tribes. Many Tribal communities were divided as non-Natives grew in presence on what used to be Tribal land and many Tribes have had to fight tirelessly to bring their lands back under collective ownership.

In social work education, problems are often understood as caused, experienced, and solved by individuals. Differences in development, health, housing, employment, food and water, and other conditions are primarily attributed to individual behavioral differences and students are taught to understand best practices as intervening primarily at the individual level.[47] This approach neglects the structural context in which problems, behaviors, and interactions unfold and stifles social workers' capacity to creatively and collaboratively solve problems at micro, mezzo, and macro levels. Thus, Jonathan M. Meztl and Helena Hansen advocate for structural competency, which they describe as

> the trained ability to discern how a host of issues defined clinically as symptoms, attitudes, or diseases (e.g., depression, hypertension, obesity, smoking, medication "non-compliance," trauma, psychosis) also represent the downstream implications of a number of upstream decisions about such matters as health care and food delivery systems, zoning laws, urban and rural infrastructures, medicalization, or even about the very definitions of illness and health.[48]

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[47] Haley, 211.

[48] Jonathan M. Metzl and Helena Hansen, "Structural Competency: Theorizing a New Medical Engagement with Stigma and Inequality," *Soc Sci Med* (2014): 5.

Structural competency in social work education involves teaching students how to see the problems, desires, strengths, and resources of any particular client as connected to a broader set of social relations. Meztl and Hansen write about it in the context of health, but the same competency might help us to understand why Tribes are outraged at the threats to ICWA or why they might be so hard pressed to bring their lands back under collective ownership. At DePaul University, however, students report a lack of structural competence in their graduate education. One student in their first year of the program reported feeling surprised at the lack of structurally-focused curricula in the MSW program, saying:

> I feel like I was surprised when I saw my class layout for the 2 years that I'm supposed to be in the program and not seeing classes dedicated to, you know, feminist theory or other differences, like social constructs. I think it feels really important. I thought I was going to be learning more by going into a social work program.

Students going into social work do so because they/we desire to learn about more than just individual behavioral problems. As opposed to choosing a clinical counseling program, for example, students such the one who shared the above observation expect to be taught structural competency either through feminist theory or otherwise through their social work education.

Structural competency education, or the lack thereof, may or may not be observable in enrollment grids or degree progress reports. Some programs may choose to integrate lessons around structure, social positions, and social relations into classes not explicitly about those topics. For example, a course entitled “Community Practice I” or “Program Evaluation” may not necessarily cue students into the extent to which structural competency is included. Nevertheless, a student in their third year of the program argued that “we're not being prepared as clinicians, but we're also not using the rest of that time to have a deeper sociological approach. So I kind of

feel like we're getting neither." Another student affirmed this remark, stating: "I agree with that. . . I feel like I'm in this weird in-between where I'm not going deep enough into the sort of theory behind how we interact with other people as well as the hard skills." When asked, all four students agreed in feeling as though they are not learning about human behavior and how to work with individuals *and* not learning about the social environment and how to analyze context.

With regard to settler colonialism, this is not to say that students are not being educated at all. When asked to reflect on examples of when they were taught about settler colonialism, decolonization, and/or Native peoples, one students shared several examples:

> One was in my HBSE class. We have the option for a paper where we were able to choose from certain books to do basically a psychosocial assessment. And so one of the options was for a book written by a Native American about a little boy that lived on a reservation. I forgot what it was called. And then I think of two from this year. One was in [Dr. Maria Ferrera's] class. That was the first time I had Maria for 'Practice,' so I guess it was the beginning of our 'Community Practice.' I feel like we really spent like a couple of weeks on thinking more largely about Indigenous peoples and looking critically at Land Acknowledgement, thinking about restorative justice, and some larger themes. And then in [Dr. Sonya Crabtree-Nelson's] class, we had one day where we learned about the Menominee from, I guess, a more personal perspective from her.

The book which this student is referring to is *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie (Spokane-Coeur d'Alene). This assignment and other class discussions are certainly focused on the lived experiences of and challenges faced by Native individuals and communities. For that reason, these lessons are of vital importance. Yet, many of these lessons did not expand upon those individual or community experiences toward a better

understanding of the structure of settler colonialism and the social relations which it dictates. That same student further reflected on the discussion which took place in their/our "Community Practice I" course, adding that the extent to which they discussed the structure of settler colonialism "was Rumi defining that to our class which, I think, demonstrates the depth that we were able to go into, which was not very much." So settler colonialism as a structure was defined in part by a student in the class, and further discussion was limited. Thus, student's understanding of the connections between Native peoples' lived experiences and the structure which gives rise to those experiences was also limited.

Dr. Crabtree-Nelson's lessons on her relation to the Menominee people take a different and more personal approach, as these students have noted, with regard to social relations. During Dr. Crabtree-Nelson's "Advanced Social Welfare Policy II" course, she shared that her parents owned property which had been previously part of the Menominee reservation lands. This particular lesson used her personal anecdote and the documentary "Legend Lake: A Talking Circle," produced by the Terra Institute,[49] to outline the circumstances faced by the Tribe. She challenged students to use the "advocacy mapping" approach by Richard Hoefer[50] to identify the goals stated by the Menominee in their efforts to reacquire their lands. She then referenced *Making a Difference: My Fight for Native Rights and Social Justice* by Ada Deer, the first

[49] Mark Anthony Rolo, "Legend Lake: A Talking Circle," Terra Institute, October 25, 2011, video, 34:10, http://www.terrainstitute.org/legend_lake.html.

[50] Richard Hoefer, *Advocacy Practice for Social Justice*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 86-103.

woman to head the BIA and a trained social worker. On a slide labeled "Structural change,"[51] Dr. Crabtree-Nelson included a link to a video of a speech by Deer.[52]

This is an effective example of a lesson which takes a challenge faced by a community and makes direct connections to the structure which makes it possible. Dr. Crabtree-Nelson articulated the actions of individuals, such as her parents, who purchase land and support the existing structure, the policies which enable them to do so, and the efforts made by the Tribe to address them. Significantly, she did so using a multi-media approach involving a personal anecdote and lecture, short documentary, class activity, and speech recording.

While this example may be held up as an effective lesson on structural competency in regard to settler colonialism, students report that other lessons using the same set of social relations as a case study do not have the same impact. One student, who was not in the advanced policy course, added: "I have also had Sonya as a professor, and I don't feel like we've necessarily had full blown teaching moments. But she has had personal anecdotes about her relationship with, I believe she lived on or near a reservation, so she had anecdotes about the Menominee." In order to effectively teach structural competency related to settler colonialism, social work educators must be explicit in outlining the social position of and relations among actors involved in any given case study and the connections these actions have to policy and organizing.

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[51] Sonya Crabtree-Nelson, "Policy II: Making the Plan," (lecture, DePaul University, Chicago, IL, October 20, 2022).

[52] Ada Deer, "Ada Deer: Making a Difference," November 19, 2019, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI, 55:35, https://www.pbs.org/video/ada-deer-making-a-difference-oa1jgw/.

Intersectionality

The foremost framework used to conduct structural analyses is intersectionality. Intersectionality has its origin in the anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa.[53] This groundbreaking collection of work focussed on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of women of color, arguing that each system is constructed through the others and are thus inseparable. Later, in her pieces "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" and "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," Kimberly Crenshaw further developed the racialized, gendered, and classed analysis first articulated by Moraga, Anzaldúa, and company into a formal theoretical framework and coined the now popular term "intersectionality."[54] Crenshaw distinguishes between political and structural intersectionality. Political intersectionality describes how women of color are located within multiple marginalized groups with sometimes conflicting agendas. Structural intersectionality describes how women of color are situated in multiple, intersecting structures of oppression. These unique social positions are represented by a traffic intersection wherein women of color must navigate the complex flows of power along multiple avenues.

Intersectionality can be efficacious for social workers working with individuals and communities, Native or non-Native, insofar as it helps us to situate their experiences at the

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[53] Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1981).

[54] Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," University of Chicago Legal Forum (1989): 138-167. Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," Stanford Law Review 43, no. 124 (1991): 1241-1299.

intersections of multiple structures of power.[55] Structures such as settler colonialism, racial capitalism, neoliberalism, imperialism, and heteropatriarchy are always/already present when working in the context of the US. Settler colonialism organizes society to allow access to property in the form of land to some, while actively eliminating the Indigenous population and constructing Others as property themselves to be owned and enslaved.[56] Property ownership allowed those select few to begin generating capital and building wealth, sometimes over multiple generations. Open markets and austerity measures incentivised the expansion of political and economic control by the settler state and its corporations to countries throughout the Global South. Those with sufficient capital attempt to monopolize access to both the means of production and positions of political decision-making. All the while each system is engendered with the binary and pathological framework of male/man and female/woman, which serves to reinforce an ideology of inter- and intra-racial and class superiority.[57] White women capitalized on the binary construction of gender imposed by settler colonialism to make themselves synonymous with and indispensable to the ongoing settler project. White women, mostly in the upper/owning-classes, actively engaged in the elimination of Natives (and others) through the deployment of assimilation practices such as friendly visits, settlement houses, and family separation via foster care (see chapter II).

Intersectionality not only helps us understand early social workers and the origins of social work as a field, but also in understanding the lived experiences of Native peoples today. In her piece "Native Women and Sexual Assault: Implications for Intersectionality," Roe Bubar

[55] Roe Bubar, "Native Women and Sexual Assault: Implications for Intersectionality," In *Social Issues in Contemporary Native America: Reflections from Turtle Island*, edited by Hillary N. Weaver, Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2014: 173-174. Haley, 211.

[56] Smith, 67-68. Wolfe, 388.

[57] Smith, 69-70.

illustrates the efficacy of both a political and structual intersectional analysis of Native women's experience of sexual assault. Citing Crenshaw,[58] she states:

> Native women in this study discuss the ways in which sexual violence is complicated by their political indentities as tribal members and the difficulties they encounter within the tribal context when Native men are identified as offenders. At the same time, Native women must negotiate embedded 'forms of domination hindering their ability' to address or seek services for sexual violence all of which is further complicated by structural systems and the government's responsibility to provide adequate health care and protect Indigenous women.[59]

Native women experiencing sexual assault are connected to settler colonialism *and* heteropatriarchy, constructing them as inherently rapable.[60] Furthermore, because many Tribal communities are impoverished, resources are often limited and cases of sexual assault are not always investigated. When they are investigated, Native women become vulnerable once again to the racist and sexist perceptions of non-Native investigators who may perceive both victim/survivor and perpetrator as pathologically abusive of alcohol and of each other.[61]

Intersections between structures are the arenas in which all interactions occur in the US. From these structures trickle down the privilege and/or oppression of some individuals and communities through policy, institutional organizing, interpersonal exchange, and internalized ideas of self in relation to others. Despite its potential as an analytical tool and framework for

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[58] Crenshaw, 1991, 1242.

[59] Bubar, 174.

[60] Bubar, 179. Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*, (Germany: Duke University Press, 2015).

[61] Bubar, 177.

thinking structurally in a way that includes but is not limited to settler colonialism, students report either not having received any education regarding intersectionality in their graduate social work education or discussions that revolve around ideas of identity rather than around structure. In regard to the prior, one student reported that "intersectionality is more so something that we talk about a lot in my [Women's and Gender Studies] classes, but it's not really discussed in social work, unfortunately." Another student simply stated: "I cannot give any examples of certain conversations or lessons." Regarding the latter, one student described how intersectionality related to identity is vaguely woven into curricula:

> I think it's maybe woven into the things that we talk about a little bit. I think, specifically, when we're talking about social workers putting diversity into consideration. Especially where we're coming from for our own identities, thoughts, ideas, all of that. And how that interacts with our clients, right? Like when they're coming from a different background.

Another student also reported an emphasis on identity when reflecting on a discussion of intersectionality in one of their first-year courses:

> I think it was just talking about how people's identities contribute to their interaction with their environment and understanding how they differ. And talking about how intersectionality allows us to better examine the ways that interactional relationships work based on, you know, different identities and combinations of different identities, I guess. And just understanding that that is going to affect people's experiences and the way that they're able to interact with their environment socially.

It is common to hear social work students, professors, and practitioners speak about the possession of multiple, simultaneous identities as the center around which intersectional analyses are framed. While identity can certainly be a useful analytical tool, its utility is limited if not lost

entirely when taken out of context. Identities and structures of power are co-constituted: they form and are formed by one another. To speak of one's identities without scrutiny of structures stifles the ability to work toward common goals and challenge systems which oppress.[62]

It is imperative that social work students be structurally competent in order to understand how settler colonialism impacts the lives of those in what is currently the US. Students can benefit from engaging frameworks such as intersectionality beyond discussions of identity toward a reading of the structural nature of the challenges facing the field and those whom it aspires to support. Graduate social work education is hard pressed, therefore, to develop and teach readings of individual problems at the macro level as well as the mezzo and micro levels. Only then can students assess how challenges facing the Menominee people, for example, are directly connected to policies, organizing, and individual actions which impact us in what is currently Chicago as well.

Indeed settler colonialism is a structure and should be treated as such, and intersectionality can help us understand the ways that it is intimately connected with other structures. We also must not focus so narrowly on the presenting problems that we neglect the settler colonial history. To this end, Bubar argues that intersectionality "must be contextualized within a history of ethnic cleansing and genocidal policies promulgated by settler states and embedded in policies like forced boarding schools, the termination of tribes, relocation of Native Peoples, and removal of tribes from traditional homeland areas."[63] Graduate social work education is further challenged to contend with the ways in which settler colonialism has impacted the field throughout its history.

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[62] Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality*, (Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2016). Smith, 2015, pp. 69-70.

[63] Bubar, 176.

Chapter II:

Neglect of Settler Colonial History

Students in the department are located at the crossroads of several historical trajectories. Not only are we aspiring social workers, and thus inheritors to the field's genealogy, we are also members of the broader university network and residents of what is currently the city of Chicago. Thus, we are situated within the development of each of these entities simultaneously. This is particularly salient for social work students because we act as representatives of the department and the university as we engage directly with the broader community through our field work. Furthermore, Chicago has a significant history of social work practice and is often referenced in the origin story of the field. Indeed, several students reported having briefly learned about social work in Chicago, with one student reflecting on the "Professional Writing and Development" course, saying "each week we talked about things like a famous old social worker or something. It was kind of spread out over the course, so I feel like that was kind of the structure. And that led to going over some of, you know, the history and the Hull House and all of that stuff."

So, education around history is certainly taking place within the department. Focus group discussion illuminated a lack of depth in these lessons, however. For example, another student stated that one of their classes "really, very, very briefly talked about social work in regards to Chicago. But, other than that, it's not something that we've ever talked about in classes." In response to this comment, a third student added: "for me, I feel like sort of as [the previous student] said, it is sort of a gloss over. We talked about it in one of my classes last quarter, but we only talked about it for part of one class."

The fourth student reported a particularly memorable interaction with a professor wherein another student raised the topic of history and the professor declined to engage in discussion. The student reported:

> I have had instances of students trying to speak up about the history of social work and being shut down by the professor, though. So, I will say that's why I don't really believe that I will be taught about it very much. Because the professors seem to be a bit reluctant or a bit defensive about the history of it when it's brought up.

When asked to share more about one of these examples and speak to the professor's rationale for shutting students down when asking to speak on this topic, the student explained that

> They didn't have it. That's why it was so memorable to me because I remember they just said 'that's not what we're talking about right now' and that was just it each time. The particular student that I'm thinking of has done it multiple times and every single time, even though it was always pretty relevant, I believe the professor just said 'that's not what we're talking about' or at one point they said 'that was brave of you to disagree with me.' But the student wasn't disagreeing, they just offered more facts.

This chapter treats the city of Chicago, DePaul University, and the field of social work as entities in and of themselves which are all situated in a history of settler colonialism. In briefly tracing these histories, this chapter illustrates both the ways in which students are implicated in settler colonialism by way of their status as students in the department and the urgency of historical content in social work education at DePaul.

Situating the city of Chicago

Despite studying in what is currently the city of Chicago as well as doing field work, paid labor, and living in the area as well, students report not being taught about the history of the city

in social work education at DePaul. One student stated “I don't think ever in any of my classes we've talked about the history of Chicago, really.” Nevertheless, Chicago has a dense history both directly and indirectly related to social work and always/already balanced on the elimination of Native peoples.

No matter where you are in what is currently known as the United States, you are on Native land, and the city of Chicago is no different. Most frequently cited as the Native peoples of this land are the Potawatomi, Ojibwe, and Odawa together known as the Three Fires Confederacy. Other peoples often cited are the Ho-Chunk, Sac, Fox, Myaamia, Kickapoo, and Peoria. The current-day city of Chicago is vast and it is therefore not difficult to imagine that all of these different peoples had a relationship to the land it occupies. It is important, however, to speak with some level of specificity regarding the impact that Chicago’s development has had on Native peoples historically and contemporarily.

There were a number of treaties which facilitated settler access to this land, most notably: the Treaty of Chicago in 1833.[64] The signing of this treaty was witnessed by hundreds of Natives and non-Natives. Leading up to the signing of the treaty, several conflicts had arisen as settlers encroached farther and farther into unceded Potawatomi territory.[65] In order to avoid further conflict and secure safety and support for their Tribe, the leaders of the Potawatomi ceded land in what is now Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan to the US and began to march to scattered land allotments throughout the midwest.

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[64] Helen Hornbeck Tanner, “Treaties,” *The Electronic Encyclopedia of Chicago*, The Chicago Historical Society and The Newberry Library, accessed September 26, 2022, http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1270.html.

[65] R. David Edmunds, “The Prairie Potawatomi Removal of 1833,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 68, no. 3 (1972): 240-253.

With the land legally in their possession, settlers began executing their city plans. In order for Chicago to be the bustling midwestern metropolis they envisioned, routes previously established by Native peoples were integrated into the city blueprint. Trading routes and trails became roads and some were developed into the highway system which currently enables travel in, out, and through the city.[66] Settlers also took advantage of the opportunity to expand their agricultural production and trade with access and resources made available through land acquisition. Initially inspired by the robust farming practices of the Potawatomi, settlers such as the famous John Deere developed technology to "unlock" the potential of the soil, expand their businesses, and accumulate wealth.[67]

It is undeniable that, without inter-Tribal trading routes, practices, and knowledge of plants and farming from Native peoples, Chicago would not have grown into the city it is today. This remains quite literally true, as challenges have continued to be raised regarding the unceded territory along the lakeshore. In his chapter "Claims Making to the Chicago Lakefront," from his book entitled *Imprints: The Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians and the City of Chicago*, John N. Low (Potawatomi) discusses the basis upon which the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi filed a 1914 lawsuit against the city to reclaim unceded lands occupied Chicago. Low illuminates that treaties signed by Native nations did not cede the lakebed along the shore of lake Michigan. Since the time that those treaties were signed, however, the city has undergone several projects involving lakefill to extend the territory of the city eastward into the lakebed. Whereas the lakefront used to run along the east side of Michigan Avenue, the city has since added Streeterville; the Gold Coast; Lincoln, Grant, and Jackson Parks; the Museum Campus; Soldier

[66] Jesse Dukes, "Without Native Americans, Would We Have Chicago As We Know It?" WBEZ, WBEZ 91.5 Chicago, published November 12, 2017. https://interactive.wbez.org/curiouscity/chicago-native-americans/

[67] Dukes.

Field; the Illinois Central and the Metra Lines; and Lake Shore Drive atop unceded Potawatomi land.[68] Ultimately, the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi were ruled against, and Chicago continues to occupy their land. More recent collaborations have attempted to draw attention to this with several art installations, including a line of bright red sand marking the boundary where the unceded land begins and a large sign by Andrea Carlson (Ojibwe) along the river walk, pictured below, which reads"Bodéwadmikik ėthë yéyék/You are on Potawatomi Land."[69]

Indeed, without the removal of Native peoples, Chicago would not exist as it is. So it is clear that each and every person who lives, works, or studies in the city has/is benefitted/ing at the expense of Native peoples. We must ask ourselves how the plot upon which our apartments and houses rest, the roads we take, or the sprawling campus on which we go to class would be different in lieu of settler colonial efforts. How would *we* be different? And, given the situation, how can things be different in the future?

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[68] Low, 64-94.

[69] Image taken by Anna Munzesheimer and retrieved from https://www.architecture.org/land-acknowledgment/.

One student reported professors speaking positively about being social workers in Chicago while still neglecting to elaborate on the historical context:

> I've heard maybe one or two professors mention that Chicago is a great place to be learning and practicing social work because we have just a diverse array of populations in Chicago. And it's this dense urban environment that, you know, you have a lot of options once you graduate for what kind of work you might want to do. But not like the history or even necessarily giving a ton of context with the city itself. So yeah, pretty minimal.

Chicago is a "dense urban environment" currently due to the history of both removal and of relocating Native peoples. Native peoples were relocated from Tribal reservations to large cities, such as Chicago, through the Indian Relocation Act of 1956. Starting with a particular focus on Diné (Navajo) and Hopi individuals, relocation policy expanded from the Navajo-Hopi Act to Operation Relocation which included other Tribal communities. Expansion also meant establishing field offices in Chicago and other major cities.[70] Eventually, the Indian Relocation Act was passed and Natives began flooding into urban areas with the promise of developing their professional skills, finding jobs, pursuing education, fighting impoverishment, and more.

Despite the promise of a different type of life, relocation policies had insidious intentions. Native peoples are a threat to the settler-state insofar as they exist *as peoples*, thus the common refrain "to exist is to resist." By relocating individual Natives to dense urban environments, the US government hoped to sever their ties to their communities, traditions, and identities as Natives. Thus, while any individual Native person may go on living, they no longer exist as a Tribal community or nation.

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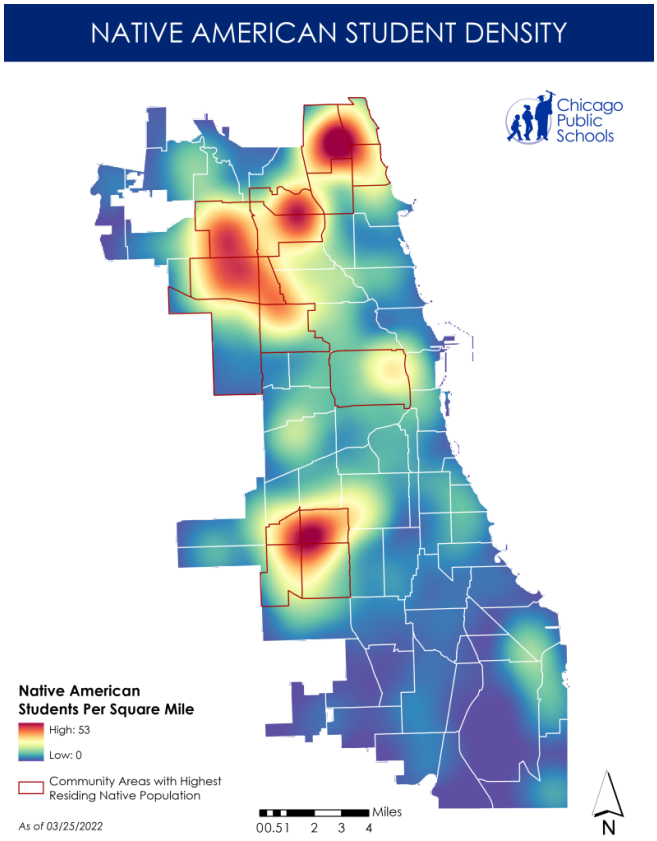
[70] Larry W. Burt, "Roots of the Native American Urban Experience: Relocation Policy in the 1950s," *American Indian Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1986): 88.

Today, Chicago is often referred to as having the third largest urban Native population in the United States. According to Census data for 2021, American Indians and Alaska Natives total approximately 0.5% of the population totalling approximately 13,483 individuals.[71] This number includes people identifying within this group alone and does not include people of mixed race. It also does not account for Tribal enrollment status. In 2022, Chicago Public Schools published the following map indicating the relative population density of Native American students in their district. Using this as an indicator, one may surmise that the population of Natives in the city is most highly concentrated on the far north, northwest, and southwest sides of the city.[72]



Additionally, Natives have organized throughout the history of the city to form organizations and collectives intended to address needs, desires, and strengths of their communities. These organizations include the American Indian Center, Newberry Library, Chicago American Indian Community Collaborative, Mitchell Museum of the American Indian, Chicago Title VI American Indian Education Program, American Indian Association of Illinois,

[71] "Quick Facts," United States Census Bureau, July 1, 2022, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/chicagocityillinois/PST045221#PST045221.

[72] Image retrieved from https://t7kids.wordpress.com/for-teachers/.

International Indigenous Youth Council, Chi Nations Youth Council, Great Lakes chapter of The Red Nation, and more.

Indeed, Chicago does have a "diverse array of populations" due to settler colonialism, which has made way for non-Natives to move in and occupy the territory as well as brought Natives into the city in attempts to separate individuals from their peoples. Therefore, the settler colonial history of the city cannot be neglected if social work education is to prepare students to work with and among those populations.

Situating DePaul University

Students are also implicated in the settler colonial history of DePaul University. The university exists within the larger Chicago ecosystem, of course, *and* it has a distinct history which is significant in and of itself. DePaul as an entity brings together the legacy of the city with private higher education and a Catholic, Vincentian mission. What is more, the Department of Social Work has an entire page dedicated to "The Vincentian Heritage and Social Work" wherein it states that "there is significant symmetry between the profession and the mission of the university."[73] Still, no student participating in this study reported having learned about the history of the university, the Catholic Church, St. Vincent DePaul, or the Vincentian order through their social work education. One student remarked that they "definitely have not talked about at all the history of DePaul as a university itself."

In November of 2022, the university officially released its universal Land Acknowledgement at an event marking the beginning of Native American Heritage Month. As with many universities, the Acknowledgement is brief and intended to be read to the beginning of any major campus activity. Interestingly, unlike other institutions, DePaul made plaques

[73] "The Vincentian Heritage and Social Work," DePaul University, accessed October 18, 2022, https://las.depaul.edu/academics/social-work/about/Pages/vincentian-heritage.aspx.

engraved with the Acknowledgement which departments could order and receive to decorate their offices with.

Besides the opportunity to adorn your workspace with it, there are a number of aspects of this Land Acknowledgement which make it a worthwhile read. It nods, however briefly, to a complex network of power which has enabled the university to exist, including the history of displacement inherent to the existence of Chicago as a city as well as the role that the Catholic Church has played in perpetuating settler colonialism and other colonialisms throughout the world. What follows in an elaboration on what the university has put forward in its Land Acknowledgement in order to better situate DePaul in settler colonialism. The DePaul University Land Acknowledgement reads:

> At DePaul University, we acknowledge that we live and work on traditional Native lands that are today home to representatives of well over one hundred different tribal nations. We extend our respect to all of them, including the Potawatomi, Ojibwe, and Odawa nations, who signed the Treaty of Chicago in 1821 and 1833. We also recognize the Ho-Chunk, Myaamia, Menominee, Illinois Confederacy, and Peoria people who also maintained relationships with this land.[74]

The first paragraph names a number of the Tribal nations I wrote of in the previous section as well as the Menominee and Iroquois Confederacy (Haudenosaunee). As stated before, it is not unimaginable that such a large number of Tribal nations would have a relationship with the lands which Chicago occupies due to its size and location. What the first paragraph fails to

[74] "Land Acknowledgement," Depaul University, accessed on October 18, 2022, https://offices.depaul.edu/diversity/Pages/Land-Acknowledgement-.aspx?_gl=1*1dfe3de*_ga*NzQxNTEwOTc2LjE2NjU1OTgzNzM.*_ga_642L3PSQN8*MTY4MTg0ODMyMC42NC4xLjE2ODE4NDg2MDcuMi4wLjA.*_fplc*OVBFbXhQWGxsTWJjQWpMVFFEMFoyZkxPUHNFVVBoSXBzNVBuS1RiRlJMbFlUenhqRlF3a2hYNkxRNGdybWdqTUNqOE5ud1p3Vlc5UEx2ZyUyQnp6Zzl0MGklMkIyT1c1c2VtaVhSV2pDanUyYWE0aDZRQWglMkJDcHRlQU5QbUF5aDJ3JTNEJTNE.

mention is that Reverend Edward Smith, C.M., and his followers established St. Vincent's Church where the Lincoln Park campus currently sits in 1875.[75] This is forty-two years after the Treaty of Chicago was signed.

While it might be considered moot to theorize whether or not Rev. Smith would have been able to purchase land and start a church if the Patowatomi and other Native peoples had not already been forcibly removed and the city of Chicago put in place, it is undeniable that events would not have played out in the same manner if colonization was not already underway. The establishment of St. Vincent's Church in 1875 and the opening of St. Vincent's College (later to become DePaul University) in 1898 were made possible at the expense of Native peoples. Simply stated, the church, college, and university are on Native land and owe their location, prestige, and overall state of existence to the Potawatomi and other Native peoples.

Furthermore, each of the peoples mentioned in this first part of the acknowledgement continue to exist today as peoples. Many, including the Potawatomi, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, and Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa are federally recognized Tribes with sovereign governments. Many host events, run community programs, and operate successful enterprises. Despite having been the subjects/victims of violent colonial displacement and continued neglect of the US's trust responsibilities outlined in the Treaty of Chicago, these peoples maintain their relationships with one another as a Tribe and as a nation.

The acknowledgement continues:

> We acknowledge that these sacred homelands were ruptured by the European invasion of the Americas. In 1493, Pope Alexander VI promulgated the Doctrine of Discovery, which seized Native lands and resources with impunity. This doctrine has been used by

[75] "History & Timeline," DePaul University, accessed December 5, 2022. https://www.depaul.edu/about/history-and-timeline/Pages/default.aspx.

> countries throughout the Americas, including the U.S., to legitimize colonial policies of displacement and genocide toward Native peoples and to justify colonial legacies of white superiority and global capitalism.[76]

The second paragraph adds another layer of complexity which requires attention. The Catholic Church has a history of abuse against Native communities in what is currently the US, not least of which is the history surrounding the Doctrine of Discovery. As was stated in the Acknowledgement, Pope Alexander VI put forward the Doctrine of Discovery in 1493, shortly after the famous "discoveries" made by Christopher Columbus the year prior. Simply stated, the Doctrine declared that lands not occupied by Christians were considered empty and, by divine right, Christian countries could lay claim to those lands.[77] The Doctrine was heavily relied upon to justify the establishment and expansion of the United States through war, enslavement, land theft, family separation, reeducation and conversion. In other words,the Doctrine of Discovery is part of the foundation of settler colonial genocide and thus the foundation of Catholic power in the US.

The impact that the Doctrine has had is not restricted to one particular era in US history, however. Spain, Portugal, England and the Catholic Church itself have all utilized the Doctrine in order to perpetrate different types of colonialism throughout the global south.[78] In establishing extractive mechanisms in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, they have been able to accumulate

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[76] Office of Institutional Diversity & Equity, "Land Acknowledgement," DePaul University, Office of Institutional Diversity & Equity, accessed December 5, 2022. https://offices.depaul.edu/diversity/Pages/Land-Acknowledgement-.aspx

[77] Robert J. Miller, "The Doctrine of Discovery," *The Indigenous Peoples' Journal of Law, Culture, and Resistance* 5, (2019): 39-41.

[78] Miller, 35-37.

and exchange enormous amounts of wealth at the expense of Indigenous peoples globally. In the US, the Doctrine remains the legal president for laws and policies regarding Native Nations.[79]

> We appreciate that today Chicago is home to one of the largest urban Native populations in the United States. We further recognize and support the enduring presence of Native peoples among our faculty, staff, and student body. And in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul, we reaffirm our commitment, both as an institution and as individuals, to help make our community and our society a more equitable, welcoming, and just place for all.[80]

In their explanation of how the Acknowledgement was written, the drafting committee stated that they "believed that as a Catholic University, we needed to acknowledge the Catholic Church's role in colonization."[81] Indeed, DePaul University is the beneficiary of both Chicago's and the Catholic Church's history of colonization. Further down on their Land Acknowledgement webpage, the committee cites the Native Governance Center saying "Acknowledging the land alone is not enough; it is a starting point."[82] If we take this statement seriously, that what has been done by the university in putting forth this Land Acknowledgement is just the start, the question for the committee and for DePaul University at large then becomes: what's next?

Situating Social Work

The field of social work has developed in step with the settler nation-state and has historically been responsible for enforcing settler norms and bringing individuals and communities into the fold of settler life in what is currently known as the United States. [83] As

[79] Miller, 37-39.

[80] Office of Institutional Diversity & Equity.

[81] Office of Institutional Diversity & Equity.

[82] Office of Institutional Diversity & Equity.

[83] Clarke and Yellow Bird, 1-46. Haley, 215-217. Johnston-Goodstar, 315-316.

such, modern social work is inseparable from the structure of settler colonialism and grounded in ideas of a good life and just society only insofar as they affirm that structure.[84] Students in the Department of Social Work at DePaul are the inheritors of this colonial legacy; however, students report a lack of education around settler colonial history of social work. One student reported that "in some classes we have touched on the topics of social work as a racist institution and social work as having colonialist origins, but I don't feel it's been properly grappled with. I don't feel like we've had real conversations about it."

What this comment reveals is that there is an awareness amongst professors in the department that social work has a "racist" or "colonialist" history yet they have neglected to facilitate meaningful discussion around these topics. Another student affirmed this pattern, stating:

> There have been a couple of times I can think of where it's sort of like 'there's something to know there,' but no one's ever elaborated on it. So I've heard 'well, you know, we're working to change how it used to be,' or 'we can't just continue the negative history,' but no one's ever said what that negative history is or explained it.

As with the student who spoke about their "Profession Writing and Development" class at the beginning of this chapter, students in the department are evidently having conversations about the history of the field and significant figures therein, but these conversations are reportedly superficial and only hint at a problematic past as opposed to contending with it.

Students in the department are not alone in experiencing this lack of education regarding settler colonial history and social work. In her piece "Intersectional and Relational Frameworks: Confronting Anti-Blackness, Settler Colonialism, and Neoliberalism in U.S. Social Work," Jennifer Maree Haley reflects on her own experience as a graduate social work student learning

[84] Clarke and Yellow Bird, 26-46.

about the history of the field, which was restricted to upholding the works of figures like Jane Addams and Mary Richmond. Haley recalls that "these lessons that centered White women as saviors failed to recognize the harm done by the imposition of whiteness and respectability politics onto the communities they were allegedly 'saving'."[85]

Indeed, the early projects where modern social work finds its origins are nothing more than complex efforts to promote assimilation into the dominant settler society.[86] Clarke and Yellow Bird argue in their chapter "Grounding modern social work" that settlement houses, such as Jane Addams' Hull House in Chicago, viewed "assimilation as the main route to achieving acceptance by the dominant (white) American social order" and that they "utilized an Anglo-American Christian model of social work" to simultaneously bring people into the folds of settler society and exclude people of color from receiving services.[87] These early practices secured white women's place within the emerging settler society and were the precise methods through which white women pushed for the professionalization of social work as a field.

Citing Margaret D. Jacobs' book entitled *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940*, Haley further contextualizing the professionalization of social work through the works of Addams, Richmond, and their successors as directly supporting the settler colonial structure and, in fact, co-constitutive with settler colonialism: "white women reformers proved themselves to be 'fit for policy making and governance' by making themselves 'indispensable to completing colonization' by implementing Indian removal and relocation policies beginning in the late nineteenth century," and they "participated in the genocide of

[85] Haley, 214.

[86] Clarke and Yellow Bird, 23, 64.

[87] Clarke and Yellow Bird, 23.

Indigenous people under the political guise of assimilation policies, specifically using child removal and relocation practices to meet their end goal."[88]

Child removal and relocation, and other methods of family separation constitutes one of many approaches to eliminating Native peoples.[89] Removing a child from their family/community/Tribe stifles their relationship to land, ancestry, ceremony, community, and self. Substantial testimony from survivors of Boarding Schools for Native children and foster care attest to the devastating impacts family separation can have. With regard to social work, practitioners have continued in the legacy of their/our originators by playing a significant role in family separations via the foster care system. For example, Sandy White Hawk spoke to Rebecca Negal of the "This Land" podcast about her childhood on the Lakota Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota, reporting:

> I've heard people say, 'yeah, we had a drill in our house that if a car drove up the driveway, we knew that it would be somebody from the government or social worker or something. . .' I remember one of my uncles saying that he remembers the day that the social worker came and got me, drove into the driveway and I was toddling around and they were all sitting around the house, as far as I know - that's how it was told to me. And she just simply got out of the car, scooped me up and put me in the car.

Throughout the mid-twentieth century, state and private agencies were removing as many as 25 - 35% of Native children from their families and placing approximately 85% in non-Indian foster and adoptive homes.[90] According to the National Indian Child Welfare Association, Native

[88] Haley, 215.

[89] Wolfe, 401.

[90] Bureau of Indian Affairs. "Frequently Asked Questions: Final Rule: Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) Proceedings." June 17, 2016. Bureau of Indian Affairs. "Guidelines for Implementing the Indian Child Welfare Act." December, 2016. Payan.

children were in foster care at a rate 2.7 times greater than their proportion in the general population.[91] Social work practitioners were the footsoldiers of the settler-state's attempts to eliminate Native peoples through family separations and, therefore, were directly implicated in settler colonialism. As their contemporaries, it is incumbent upon us to recon with this settler colonial history in order to work toward radical change and prevent further harm.

Indeed, opportunities to address the harm done through child removal and relocation continue to present themselves today through the defense of the ICWA. The US Congress passed the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) in 1978 to address the issues stated above. While this legislation has been regarded as highly effective and the "gold standard" in child welfare, current challenges are being heard by the US Supreme Court which threaten to undermine the Act. Social workers thus have a current opportunity to participate in defending ICWA and Tribes' authority to govern their own citizens. On-going challenges to ICWA are part of a broader effort to attack the foundations of Tribal sovereignty.[92] The repeal of ICWA would not only upend a law in place for more than 40 years but also undercut the heart of tribal sovereignty and the federal government's trust responsibility to Native communities.[93] For that reason, it is imperative that social workers take advantage of opportunities to better understand and support Tribal sovereignty. In fact, the Council on Social Work Education has identified education around sovereignty as vital for learners in the field.

Any social work program that wishes to hold a semblance of legitimacy within the field seeks accreditation through the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). According to the

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[91] Payan.

[92] Payan.

[93] Payan. Rebecca Nagal, "Trojan Horse," August 23, 2021, in *This Land,* produced by Crooked Media, podcast, MP3 audio, https://crooked.com/podcast/6-trojan-horse/.

CSWE's 2022 Educational Policies and Accreditation Standards, "accreditation is a system for recognizing educational institutions and the professional programs affiliated with those institutions as having a level of performance, integrity, and quality that entitles them to the confidence of the educational community and the public they serve."[94] It is a peer-review process that is held in high regard. The message I have received throughout my own experience in both bachelor- and master-level programs is that accredited programs are legitimate and reliable whereas unaccredited programs are risky to participate in, not professional or rigorous, and potentially not using the same theories and pedagogies as the rest of the field.

The Educational Policies and Accreditation Standards include a number of topics which social work programs should include, referred to as competencies. "Tribal sovereign status" was added under the third competency, "engage anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion in practice," in 2015 and it remained in the 2022 policies and standards.[95] Thus, programs which seek to remain accredited should be teaching about tribal sovereignty in some way. There is some flexibility as to how this happens. Programs can include education around this topic in explicit curricula, such as a class on the topic, or in implicit curricula meaning that lessons are somehow incorporated into classes or events not explicitly about the topic.[96]

Tribal sovereignty is a complex matter, though. In their piece "Myths and Realities of Tribal Sovereignty," Joseph P. Kalt and Joseph William Singer simply define sovereignty as self-rule, yet they add that the sources, state, and consequences of such a status are much more

[94] Council on Social Work Education.

[95] Council on Social Work Education.

[96] Council on Social Work Education.

difficult to understand.[97] For Tribal Nations within the boundaries of what is currently the US, sovereignty has been shaped by different efforts by the settler-state to manage and restrict Native peoples' access to land. Several treaties were signed wherein the US federal government has recognized Tribal sovereignty and agreed to provide support to tribes in exchange for land. Thus, education around "tribal sovereign status" cannot be restricted to simply defining sovereignty itself, but requires knowledge of the history and structure of settler colonialism.

Students in the Department of Social Work at DePaul university are situated at the impasse of multiple histories: the city of Chicago, DePaul University (and the Catholic Church), and the field of social work. Each of these histories are themselves situated in the structure of US settler colonialism; consequently, students them/ourselves are implicated in settler colonialism in their/our capacity as social work students. It is vital that students be engaged in historical education around settler colonialism. In pursuing such a goal, we may yet have the capacity to change the future.

[97] Joseph P. Kalt and Joseph Williams Singer, "Myths and Realities of Tribal Sovereignty: The Law and Economics of Indian Self-Rule," *Native Issues Research Symposium*, Harvard University, December 4-5, 2003, https://ssrn.com/abstract=529084.

Chapter III:

Practicing Land Acknowledgement

Land acknowledgements have become increasingly popular over the past decade. Many universities, including DePaul, have instituted campus-wide land acknowledgements usually intended to be read at every university event. Many community organizations and nonprofits and some businesses have also developed statements with a variety of different approaches to disseminating and utilizing them. Land acknowledgements have their origins in New Zealand and are intended to acknowledge the Native peoples whose homelands the given event takes place upon.[98] Practicing land acknowledgement requires thoughtful writing, delivery, and calls to action. Everything down to who should be involved to when it should be shared to what comes next have been the subject of scrutiny since their rise to popularity in the US. This chapter looks at the ways in which land acknowledgement has been practiced in the department and, in doing so, explores the overall purpose and potential of practicing land acknowledgement in graduate social work education.

The Department of Social Work at DePaul now includes a land acknowledgement at the beginning of syllabi. The acknowledgement reads:

> We extend our respect to the Potawatomi, Ojibwe, and Odawa nations who signed the Treaty of Chicago in 1821 and 1833. We also recognize the Ho-Chunk, Miami, Menominee, Illinois Confederacy, and Peoria people who also maintained relationships with this land. We acknowledge that Chicago today is home to the sixth largest urban Native population in the United States and that we live and work on traditional Native lands. We commit to examining our place in colonial structures and creating space in our

[98] Mishuana Goeman, "The Land Introduction: Beyond the Grammar of Settler Landscapes and Apologies," *Western Humanities Review* 74, no. 1 (2020): 37.

curriculum and programming to promote the intellectual, creative, and political work of indigenous people.

All four students in this study reported having had a land acknowledgement on the syllabus for at least one social work class. According to the two students in this study in their second and third years of the program, this was a practice that began in academic year 2022-2023 as they reported land acknowledgements were not included in any syllabi prior. One student in their third year of the program shared that "this is the first year that I've seen land acknowledgment as a part of our - I don't want to say curriculum - but just in the syllabi. So that was something that I never had."

Despite all students having had a class with the land acknowledgement included in the syllabus, focus group discussions revealed a lack of consistency in how the acknowledgement is (or is not) discussed during class. For example, one student reported: "I feel like, in most of my classes, we have a land acknowledgment. And sometimes there's a little more mentioned after that but more just a quick, quick piece versus a full blown teaching moment." Another student shared: "For me, it's just been in every single syllabus I've ever had for every class I've taken through social work. So, they usually just read it off of the syllabus, but it's not necessarily a discussion or a conversation. It's just like 'this is what we say to begin the class,' and then we're done." So, in many classes the land acknowledgement is included in the syllabus and read in class, but it is not elaborated on.

Land acknowledgements have often been critiqued for their performative nature, particularly when they omit any discussion of specific action steps to follow. Several syllabi in the department have included two articles which articulate this very point: "'Land Acknowledgements' Are Just Moral Exhibitionism" by Graeme Wood[99] and "The rise of land

[99] Graeme Wood, "'Land Acknowledgements' Are Just Moral Exhibitionism," The Atlantic, November 28, 2021.

acknowledgements - and their limitations" by Emily St. James.[100] If treated as "this is what we say to begin the class," as one student observed, then acknowledgement simply "relieves the speaker and the audience of the responsibility to think about Indigenous peoples," as Wood warns, at least until the next class.[101] Wood further argues that acknowledgements rarely include calls for the return of land, addressing wrongs committed against Native peoples, or even moral reckoning.[102] In St. James' interview with Joanelle Romero, CEO of Red Nation Celebration Institute, Romero arguest that land acknowledgements must lead to further conversations about healing, reconciliation, and giving the land back.[103] Nevertheless, some professors in the department appear not to be taking this next, vital step in the process of acknowledgement.

Lack of further discussion and calls to action related to the land acknowledgement leaves students with several questions, as one student illustrates:

> I feel like, in my classes, that's kind of been mentioned where it's like 'oh, you know, I'm glad that we're doing this land acknowledgment but it's also important for us to realize that it can't stop here with just a land acknowledgment. There has to be a next part.' But then we don't really get into what that looks like for us. And they kind of say that phrase like, you know, 'we make this land acknowledgement and then what?' And I felt like in the classes where that was mentioned I was sitting there, and I'm like: *So yeah, and then*

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https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/11/against-land-acknowledgements-native-american/620820/.

[100] Emily St. James, "The rise of land acknowledgements - and their limitations," Vox, July 28, 2022. https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/23200329/land-acknowledgments-indigenous-landback.

[101] Wood.

[102] Wood.

[103] St. James.

> *what? What is it? What are we doing? What are we doing with this information? How are we going to be incorporating this information and these acknowledgments later?* So, I feel like I've just kind of been left like *I'm glad you acknowledged that it's kind of performative, but then we didn't do anything to make it not performative*.

Another student shared similar sentiments after reflecting on a short discussion had in one of their classes. They initially explained:

> [Dr. Neil Vincent] talked about the land acknowledgment, and how, you know, like the rhetoric around it being performative. What's called performative activism, right? Like: 'Okay, you're acknowledging it and then what?' kind of conversation, right? And we started to go a little bit into it. But we just kind of, you know, it was our first class, we're trying to get through the syllabus type of thing. So we had a very, very brief conversation. And then we moved on and continued going. I feel like that's one of the more significant conversations that I can remember.

They later continued: "when I was in that conversation, the thing I was thinking was *Yeah, okay? Maybe we were like 2 steps forward, but like 100 steps back* kind of thing because yes, cool, we're saying it but what are we doing? What are we doing about it, right?"

So, students observe a contradiction in the department wherein some professors will acknowledge the performative elements of land acknowledgement and mention that there is further work that must be done without elaborating on or demonstrating what that work might be. As a result, students are left with a vague and confusing introduction to a class that otherwise has nothing to do with settler colonization, Native peoples, or land back - at least as far as they are taught. As one student alluded to with their question "how are we going to be incorporating this information and these acknowledgments later?" professors are often missing the key opportunity

to integrate the topics raised by land acknowledgements throughout the class, not to mention throughout the curriculum.

While students have identified this contradiction and the questions it raises, not all students were left without discussion following the land acknowledgement in their classes. One student reflected on their experience in one of Dr. Maria Ferrera's classes: "I feel like we really spent like a couple of weeks thinking more largely about Indigenous peoples, looking critically at land acknowledgment, and thinking about restorative justice and some larger themes." When asked to speak on the impact of that discussion, they added:

> I felt it was helpful because it was more provoking, and I feel like I remember her kind of asking these more pointed questions, such as: Can you think of an example of a good land acknowledgment that you witnessed, or something rather than just being like 'here's a thought, and we'll keep this in mind.' She really led us in the conversation and facilitated what can be a really uncomfortable or challenging conversation rather than leaving the onus on the students to push back or ask the hard questions.

By taking the land acknowledgement in the syllabus and leveraging its content toward "a couple weeks" of discussion clearly has a more significant and meaningful impact on students than simply reading it from the syllabus of having brief, vague conversations with little call to action.

Interestingly, that same student's reflections on the impact of that discussion also revealed a limitation to this particular approach. While, according to their report, the discussion revolved around "thinking more largely about Indigenous peoples" and "thinking about restorative justice" in addition to the practice of land acknowledgement itself, evident in their comments above is that the questions which stuck with them the most were about practicing land acknowledgements, not about the Native peoples whom they were supposed to be

acknowledging nor the students relationship to those peoples. They later went on to say “I don't necessarily know that it's, to be a social worker, helpful other than just kind of like being a member of my community that maybe can have an educated understanding of when and who it is appropriate to be involved in land acknowledgments.”

As the previous two chapters have argued, settler colonialism is a structure which is persistent through time and should be understood and taught as such in graduate social work education. In the previous chapter’s section “Situating DePaul University,” the DePaul campus-wide land acknowledgement was broken down to demonstrate the historical situatedness of the university in settler colonialism and students’ situatedness by virtue of their status as students. Land acknowledgements can and should be a launching point for further learning regarding the structural and historical nature of settler colonialism and action toward sincere support for movement(s) to address settler colonialism which, as Wood, and St. James and Romero suggest, result in material redress including giving the land back.

Tuck and Yang illustrate one way that settler colonialism attempts to eliminate Native peoples by constructing multiple narratives which displace them both spatially and temporally:

> Everything within a settler colonial society strains to destroy or assimilate the Native in order to disappear them from the land - this is how a society can have multiple simultaneous and conflicting messages about Indigenous peoples, such as all Indians are dead, located in faraway reservations, that contemporary Indigenous people are less indigenous than prior generations, and that all Americans are a ‘little bit Indian.’ These desires to erase - to let time do its thing and wait for the older form of living to die out, or to even help speed things along (euthanize) because the death of pre-modern ways of life is thought to be inevitable - these are all desires for another kind of resolve to the colonial

> situation, resolved through the absolute and total destruction or assimilation of original inhabitants.[104]

Land acknowledgements serve to support claims that the settler state makes to land by simply reinforcing that, while it may have been "theirs" at some point, "it's ours now."[105] So, while they may give the impression of growing awareness, respect, and inclusion, they can be no more than just another way to assert ownership over Native peoples' lands and lives.[106]

Practicing land acknowledgement should be intentional about disrupting these settler myths which move to engender those of us who have benefitted from them with innocence and absolve us of our responsibility for material change. Discussion could lead to further questions about the current status of the peoples who one seeks to acknowledge *because they likely continue to exist as peoples.* Wood suggests learning basic facts about a particular Tribe as a good place to begin practicing "real respect."[107]

The department's practices related to land acknowledgement are inconsistent insofar as not every class reads them, fewer classes discuss them, and only one class has taken more than part of one class for discussion. They are consistent, however, in including them in every syllabus during the 2022-2023 academic year, as students report. Also, they are consistent in not treating it as a jumpstart for teaching structural competency and historical education. In (not)

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[104] Tuck and Yang, 9.

[105] Tallbear "Beyond Indigenous Performance to Life and Land Back." Elisa J. Sobo, Michael Lambert, and ValerieLambert; "Land acknowledgments meant to honor Indigenous people too often do the opposite – erasing American Indians and sanitizing history instead," The Conversation, October 7, 2021, https://theconversation.com/land-acknowledgments-meant-to-honor-indigenous-people-too-often-do-the-opposite-erasing-american-indians-and-sanitizing-history-instead-163787.

[106] Tallbear, "Beyond Indigenous Performance to Life and Land Back."

[107] Wood.

doing so, professors do the exact thing which Wood, St. James, and others have explicitly stated not to do. This is paradoxical indeed, as the department seems to have circulated the Wood and St. James articles amongst faculty. This realization leaves us pondering, and Dr. Kim Tallbear's pointed remark comes to mind: "It may be better not to do a land acknowledgment than to do it poorly and before one has built the necessary relationships to undertake the task."[108]

[108] Tallbear, "Beyond Indigenous Performance to Life and Land Back."

Chapter IV:

Recommendations

Focus group discussions have revealed a number of themes in regards to how the Department of Social Work teaches about settler colonialism, decolonization, and Native peoples. These themes have included a lack of structural competency wherein students are not taught to treat settler colonialism as a structure which foregrounds social relations in the US, neglect of settler colonial history wherein students are taught minimally about the history of social work as a field and even lesser still about the ways in which early social workers capitalized on their gendered settler subjectivity by perpetrating family separations and attempted assimilation of Native children, and inconsistent practices of land acknowledgement which often do not lead to more meaningful learning or action if they lead to anything at all. While these themes are certainly problematic, they are also emblematic of the social work education mainstream. After all, the only thing necessary for a structure to persist is for individuals and groups to do nothing, whether knowingly or unknowingly. This final chapter is, therefore, focused on providing suggestions for things to do.

The recommendations in this chapter have been identified primarily through the literature review. Specifically, I draw from Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill's challenges for "decolonizing feminism" in Women's and Gender Studies.[109] There is no point in recreating the wheel and presenting what are essentially these same recommendations in a different order or with slightly different words. Furthermore, many of the recommendations identified from the literature review follow similar themes and are integrated herein. What follows is a synthesis of the challenges presented in "Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections Between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy" and other literature which I have simply put into the context of graduate

[109] Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill, 13-29.

social work education. As such, they are not necessarily mine nor are they the students' who participated in this study. None of us have sufficient knowledge, experience, or authority to make recommendations. You will, however, read some student thoughts, including my own, where they echo the literature or add specificity to the circumstances at DePaul.

As the department reviews the following recommendations, they should be mindful that some can be quickly implemented but most will likely take significant time and effort to execute effectively. Some are achievable given the resources available to the department currently while others may be beyond current capacity. So, I foreground the following suggestions with a reminder from Graeme Wood, with whom faculty should be well acquainted: "Real respect occurs only when accompanied by time, work, or something else of value."[110]

Problematize Settler Colonialism and its Intersections[111]

The first challenge involves looking at the ways in which "proper" gender roles are enforced to further limit and manage Native peoples' claims to land and displace Native peoples for resource extraction. For graduate social work education, this primarily involves teaching settler colonialism as a structure which intersects with other structures, such as heteropatriarchy and capitalism. To that end, the department should strongly consider couching their analyses in an intersectional framework. Sincere engagement with intersectionality challenges us to move beyond discussions about individual identity ownership and development toward a broader macro analysis. The challenge here is thus threefold: make it structural, make it intersectional, and make it consistent throughout the program.

The easiest and perhaps most efficacious way to begin is with teaching the history of social work. As one student suggested:

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[110] Wood.

[111] Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill, 14-17.

> I think it is crucial that we reckon with the history of social work and where it came from. And really, in our cohorts, go through these questions of 'Why do we still go into people's homes?' 'Why do we start doing that?' 'Why do we still do that now?' 'Why are there so many white students in our classes?' All of these questions that we haven't, in my experience, really reckoned with as a group.

The same student continued to suggest that intentional and skillfully facilitated discussions may equip students with the critical thinking skills necessary to explore new pathways in social work:

> I think maybe more of a facilitated discussion among our cohorts about social work and colonialism. I just think that there is like so much knowledge in our classrooms that's not always tapped into among the students, so kind of being forced to grapple with that together feels like maybe a way that we could come to some type of exploration. Probably not answers, but something that feels a little bit more satisfying to be able to be like 'I've grappled with this, and I figured out the way that maybe I can be a social worker and not do more harm!'

Another student echoed this suggestion:

> Just like really discussing the impact that [social work has] had on different individuals and the ways that we need to grow and change in history, not history and social work in general. So they just talk about that and the ways that social work has harmed people and continues to harm people *and* the ways that that should change in the future (emphasis mine).

Early social workers participated fully in the settler colonial project through their efforts to assimilate populations into the gendered settler society. Through time this practice shifted to include, primarily, the removal of children from Native families/communities and placing them

into foster care. While the practice has shifted yet again, we continue to enforce gendered settler subjectivity.[112] Problematizing settler colonialism and its intersection and situating the history of the field therein may have the explanatory power to demystify our present and illuminate new ways forward. As Arvin, Tuck, and Morill suggest, such an approach "could produce liberatory scholarship and activism for Indigenous women, non-Indigenous women, and, ultimately, all peoples." [113] I end this challenge with a quote from yet another student who suggests a reckoning with social work history. This comment is of particular poignance due to its last question which, in light of this study, is quite unsettling indeed. They suggest:

> Having conversations about grappling with history. What is it? How does it relate to settler colonialism? How do we move away from that? and how do we improve? Our practice is really important because this is what the program is supposed to be doing for us. We're supposed to be preparing to become social workers. So, if we don't talk about those things, how prepared are we really?

Refuse Erasure But Do More Than Include[114]

The second challenge is to move beyond inclusion by engaging with Native communities and allowing ourselves to be changed in the wake of that engagement. Inclusion efforts, particularly on campuses, have been critiqued many times over. Arvin, Tuck, and Morill emphasize that they can control and absorb dissent which stifles our ability to grow and transform.[115] In other words, putting readings about Native peoples in a class or even having Native students or faculty can be used to distract from systematic changes that are often

[112] Clarke and Yellow Bird, 23-46.

[113] Arvil, Tuck, and Moril; 17.

[114] Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill; 17-19.

[115] Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill; 17.

neglected. Entities' inclusion efforts often serve to pacify demands for sincere engagement and structural change.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the department has attempted to include Native peoples in curricula through a land acknowledgement in course syllabi. While the acknowledgement states that they "commit to examining our place in colonial structures and creating space in our curriculum and programming to promote the intellectual, creative, and political work of indigenous people," they have been inconsistent in their engagement with this acknowledgment and have yet to do more than simply acknowledge. Let us return to the quote shared at the end of the previous chapter from Dr. Kim Tallbear. Here she emphasizes that land acknowledgments can be a powerful move to refuse the erasure of Native peoples; though, she too suggests that sincere engagement with Native communities is necessary for the practice of land acknowledgement:

> It may be better not to do a land acknowledgment than to do it poorly and before one has built the necessary relationships to undertake the task. That said, there is no non-embarrassing excuse for the erasure of Indigenous-to-the-Americas history/presence in any event held on these lands. But a land acknowledgment is only one narrow strategy for making Indigenous life visible.[116]

Similarly, others scrutinizing the practice on land acknowledgement make powerful suggestions. Wood outlines three specific rules to follow and suggests objecting to any attempt to acknowledge that violates them. These rules are "1) the acknowledgment should reveal a specific relationship between the event and the people who are acknowledged. Boilerplate language is an insult, 2) it should not smell of self-congratulation, either by the speaker or the institution. If it makes you look good, you are doing it wrong. Note that one form of self-congratulation is

[116] Tallbear, "Beyond Indigenous Performance to Life and Land Back."

pedantic self-criticism, and 3) if the acknowledgment calls for restitution, it should specify the reasons for the restitution and the means for making it. If you think land should be given back or other payment made, say so. Venture a magnitude of the repayment and explain why. Even the highwayman's receipt lists the jewels and coins taken."[117]

With Wood's rules in mind, I suggest the following changes to the practice of land acknowledgement in the department. Firstly, it is worth considering using the DePaul University campus-wide acknowledgment rather than the one which has been used to this point. Secondly, add the following from Clarke and Yellow Bird (citing Tuck and Yang, and Gray, Coates, Yellow Bird, and Hetherington), which was quoted in the introduction to this piece:

> Decolonizing social work starts from the recognition that Indigenous peoples have been the subjects (and victims) of the colonizing activities of settler structures and processes and that the goals of settler colonialism have included the elimination, manipulation, control, and replacement of the Native. Decolonization concerns the 'repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools.' Decolonizing social work, therefore, is not about advancing or employing settler social work approaches. Second, mainstream social work must acknowledge the limitations of Western knowing and imperialist models of practice that have damaged Indigenous Peoples and other communities. Finally, it must actively engage with and repair the damage done by the many years of complicity with settler colonial domination.[118]

In making these two simple adjustments, the department adds further specificity to the situatedness of the university in which it operates and makes clear connections between settler

[117] Wood.

[118] Clarke and Yellow Bird, 42.

colonialism and social work. There are also suggestions for efforts moving forward. With regard to Wood's second rule, these adjustments still fall short. While more specific, the use of the same acknowledgement across all classes in the department may still be considered boilerplate. So, it is incumbent on professors to take the next step in facilitating discussion on how what has been read relates to course topics. It is not enough to discuss the relevance to social work broadly, so discussion should show how settler colonialism impacts human development, research methodology, and social welfare policy, depending on which class you are teaching.

Through focus group discussion, students expressed desires to have further discussion following the land acknowledgement, and they have several suggestions regarding the focus of those discussions:

> So, I think that there can be an opportunity where students are asked to read it. Like, it's not just on the syllabus, it's articles maybe promoting it, different ways saying anyone can do these and should always do them, or making arguments for different sides. Then for students to have it be a project in class to come into a discussion and need to make a decision about what is a better approach or write a land acknowledgment that you think is appropriate - or don't write one if you don't think it's appropriate at all! And kind of have more of an opportunity for critical discussion and the call for students to be able to interact with and push each other as well.

Another person affirmed the idea of facilitated class discussions and activities, adding particular emphasis on the purpose and motivation behind such an act:

> I don't think everybody understands why acknowledgements were made and the history behind that, right? Especially thinking about new students coming into the department. If it's going to be something that everybody is doing, I was thinking every class that starts

> the first quarter in the Fall is doing this kind of discussion because that way the entire department is having this kind of conversation. It's not like a teacher here and there kind of thing. It's everybody. It's like a department-wide requirement.

Yet another student agreed, stating:

> I did really like [the first student]'s idea of having an opportunity to create more engagement with each other about this. And I also was thinking in the same way as you, [the previous student], that there probably should be more context provided to begin with. Because I think you're right. I don't think everyone really understands, you know, where they came from or why land acknowledgments have been showing up in syllabi now.

Bubar, Kelly, Souza, Lovato-Romero, and Bundy-Fazioli make a similar suggestion in their piece "Disrupting Settler Colonial Microaggressions: Implications for Social Work." They propose students use the Native Land Digital website (native-land.ca) to learn about the land they are on and bring awareness to the effects of settler colonialism and students visit the Native Governance Center website (nativegov.org) to learn how to write land acknowledgements.[119]

Changes to the land acknowledgement itself and facilitated discussions and activities are an easy and effective way to continue to refuse erasure while beginning the process of moving beyond inclusion. The challenge goes even further, however. In discussing the entertainment industry, Joanelle Romero argues that "The industry needs to go beyond land acknowledgement. It needs to seriously start looking at the skilled [Indigenous] professionals and organizations that have been in the industry for many, many years, and start breaking that glass ceiling."[120] I echo this sentiment and challenge the department to begin developing sincere, meaningful, and

[119] Roe Bubar, Tiffani Kelly, Caridad Souza, Leslee Lovato-Romero, and Kimberly Bundy-Fazioli; "Disrupting Settler Colonial Microaggressions: Implications for Social Work," *International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics* 19, no. 2 (2022): 69.

[120] St. James.

reciprocal relationships with Native-led organizations and agencies which support Tribal sovereignty and the overall wellness of Native peoples in what is currently Chicago.

There are numerous organizations in Chicago and Illinois which are focused on policy, housing, culture, and wellness of Native peoples. Some of those organizations were listed in the second chapter, but I list them again here (amongst others) to emphasize the ample opportunities of the department to begin the slow and careful process of relationship building. Organizations include the Chicago American Indian Community Collaborative, American Indian Association of Illinois, American Indian Center of Chicago, California Indian Manpower Consortium, Caroline and Ora Smith Foundation, CPS American Indian Education Program, D'Arcy McNickle Center of American Indian & Indigenous Studies at the Newberry Library, Menominee Community Center of Chicago, Mitchell Museum of the American Indian, Native American Chamber of Commerce of Illinois, Native American Educational Services College, Northwestern University's Native American & Indigenous Initiatives, St. Kateri Center of Chicago, Trickster Cultural Center, Native American Support Program at University of Illinois, Visionary Ventures, Wolf River Consulting Group, American Indian Health Service of Chicago, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Tunica-Biloxi Tribe Chicago Branch Office, Indigenous Peoples' Day Coalition of Illinois, Great Lakes chapter of The Red Nation, and Chi Nations Youth Council.

Relationship building and collaboration may begin with consultations and discussions around current efforts underway in the community. Or, as two students suggested, Native community organizers may be invited as guest speakers in classrooms or seminars: "it could be a guest lecture that is required for all students. Maybe not all. At the same time it could be offered

multiple times, kind of thing, right? So, it could be like a guest lecture type of thing." Another students continued:

> piggybacking off of [the previous student]'s ideas about having guest lectures and things like that, it got me thinking about some of the required seminars for Field. Because it's a time that everyone can kind of get together and it was offered via zoom and in person sometimes. But I think that that might be a good opportunity to have some of that additional conversation, or specifically having, you know, a required seminar based on social works' relationship with settler colonialism and decolonization.

So, beyond inclusion through land acknowledgement, the department has a plethora of opportunities to begin engaging with the community and building students' (and staff and faculty) capacity to work with Native peoples toward Native peoples' goals.

Craft Alliances That Directly Address Differences[121]

The third challenge is to scrutinize structures of oppression and our locations therein as issues that are critical to decolonization and political work that must be addressed. Settler colonialism and its intersections foreground social relations, so it is imperative that we understand how we are situated in those structures in relation to others in order to effectively work together. This practice is often referred to as self-reflexivity.

The department should be reflexive insofar as it understands its position within settler colonialism historically and its contemporary social position within the city at large. The university represents a network of power which Native organizations may or may not want to engage with. Thus, in their attempts to build relationships with such organizations, the department should be careful to extend invitations, with clearly stated intentions, and not demands. It should be prepared to compensate guest speakers proportionate to the service which

[121] Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill, 19-21.

they are providing by starting with what the guest believes is reasonable and moving to fulfilling that expectation.

Furthermore, teaching structural competency to graduate students should also involve an exploration of positionality and individual standpoint. Sandpoint theory suggests that our social position arms us with a partial perspective which is always/already informed by our experiences of privilege and oppression.[122] Students should be taught the skills necessary to identify the nature and scope of their own standpoint with regard to Native peoples and to engage directly with that toward more meaningful engagement. To that end, the department may also consider teaching feminist methodologies for working together across differences, such as those by Uma Narayan or Kum-Kum Bhavnani.[123] Of course, there is also Linda Tuhiwai Smith's seminole book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*.[124] In addition, there is a continuously growing body of literature providing guidance for social workers working with Natives. Hillary N. Weaver, Michael Yellow Bird, and Roe Bubar are all contributors to this literary body and serve as starting points for further exploration.

Lastly, and most importantly, Arvil, Tuck and Morill emphasize that our efforts to work together across differences should not erase issues of land or tribal belonging. Instead, our efforts should be grounded in what Tuck and Yang called an ethic of incommensurability. As discussed

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[122] Sandra Harding, "Introduction: Standpoint Theory as a Site of Political, Philosophic, and Scientific Debate," In *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, edited by Sandra Harding, (New York and London: Routledge, 2004) 1-16. Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 589.

[123] Uma Narayan, "Working Together Across Difference: Some Considerations on Emotions and Political Practice," *Hypatia* 3, no. 2 (1988): 31-47. Kum-Kum Bhavnani, "Tracing the Contours: Feminist Research and Feminist Objectivity," *Women's Studies Int. Forum* 16, no. 2 (1993): 95-104.

[124] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* Second Edition, (New Zealand: Otago University Press, 2012).

in the literature review, an ethic of incommensurability recognizes what is distinct about projects of decolonization and that the distinction is itself the site where the potential for solidarity lies.[125] Decolonization will require radical change to the social and material order of the world because the goal is nothing short of breaking the structure of settler colonialism. This means the return of land, recognition and respect of sovereignty, abolition of slavery in all its contemporary forms, and a dismantling of the imperial metropole that is the US.[126]

It is my contention that social workers fear a decolonized future in large part because our careers depend upon the current structure. Many of our positions and organizations are made possible through funding from the settler state. We lean into neoliberalism, and settler colonialism and racial capitalism by extension, rather than challenge it because a decolonized future would mean that our careers would be radically transformed or even abolished. Consequently, we must decenter our own interests and be more proactive in learning about settler colonialism and its intersections. We may then put less onus on Native peoples to educate us and be more effective allies in our commitments to structural change.

Recognize Indigenous Ways of Knowing[127]

The fourth challenge is to recognize Indigenous ways of knowing as legitimate and rigorous intellectual contributions to the field of social work and beyond. For Arvin, Tuck, and Morill, this is most notable in regards to land, sovereignty, and futurity. They state that, for Native peoples, the land (including the ocean, plants, insects, and more) is itself a source of knowledge from which their peoples have learned since the beginning of time. As a result, ruptures to their relationship with land are materially and spiritually destructive in ways that

[125] Tuck and Yang, 28.

[126] Tuck and Yang, 31.

[127] Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill, 21-25.

non-Natives often have difficulty understanding. In regards to sovereignty, Native feminist theorists challenge recognition sought through the settler state and instead assert that Native nations' sovereignty is inherent. Furthermore, they challenge the imposition of settler gender norms which limit institutional power to the role of men and argue that Native understandings of gender and power undermine such oppressive binaries. Lastly, they assert that Native peoples are deeply invested in a future based on terms of their own making. To deny the possibility of such a future, they say, constitutes a rehashing of colonial tropes.

For other scholars, such as Patricia Penn Hilden and Leece M. Lee, the emphasis is on the practice of storytelling. They argue that stories are a large part of the solution to Western, often male/men-focused academia wherein Indigenous stories, arts, dances, and languages are systematically devalued.[128] One may also look to Jo-ann Archibald, Jenny Lee-Morgan, and Jason De Santolo's anthology *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology* for a collection of works related to storytelling in intellectual inquiry.[129] This is also reflected in Clarke and Yellow Bird's *Decolonizing Pathways Toward Integrative Healing in Social Work*. The introduction includes both authors' story as to how they came to produce that particular work and to make its themes their career's work.[130] They also begin every chapter with a story which foregrounds the chapter's contents and makes real what might otherwise be ambiguous or purely theoretical.

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[128] Patricia Penn Hilden, Leece M. Lee. "Indigenous Feminism: The Project," in *Indigenous Women and Feminism: Politics, Acticism, Culture*, edited by Cheryl Suzack, Shari M. Huhndorf, Jeanne Perreault, and Jean Barman (British Columbia: UBC Press, 2010): 58-64.

[129] Jo-Ann Archibald, Jenny Lee-Morgan, and Jason De Santolo, *Decolonizing Research : Indigenous Storywork as Methodology* (London, UK: ZED Books Ltd, 2019).

[130] Clarke and Yellow Bird, 15-22.

Clarke and Yellow Bird further assert that the field of social work engages in professional imperialism wherein they/we attempt to adapt Western methods of helping for communities with fundamentally different ontological and epistemological realities.[131] Thus, they dedicate entire chapters to exploring the role of water, creative expression, movement, quiet and contemplation, fellow creatures, and "Mother Earth" in Native lifeways. They challenge social workers to shift their value systems towards a centering of Native ways of knowing, particularly when working with Native communities. Fundamental to their argument, though, is that such a shift would be beneficial in social workers' engagement with all peoples. The department may consider further exploring this text and evaluating how it might be used to change curricula.

Across all works addressing the importance of Native ways of knowing, authors emphasize the contextual significance. Just as it is essential for social workers to be reflexive in how they/we have come to know what they/we "know" and do what they/we do, so too must Native knowledges be placed in the context of several centuries of colonial violence. Arvin, Tuck, and Morill state that "Native feminist theories make claims not to an authentic past outside of settler colonialism, but to an ongoing project of resistance that continue to contest patriarchy and its power relations."[132] In other words, the "ways of knowing" to which they refer in this challenge are not those imagined, ancient wisdoms which Native peoples knew and practiced prior to colonization, but the result of thousands of years of knowledge sharing which includes resistance setter colonial suppression. Clarke and Yellow Bird similarly state:

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[131] Clarke and Yellow Bird, 70-85.

[132] Arvin, Tuck, and Morill; 21. Penn Hilden and Lee, 74-75. Doreen Martinez, Karina Cespedes, Roe Bubar, Caridad Souza, "When the Decolonial Goes Precolonial: Voices of Ancestors, Revolutions, and Being," *International Review of Qualitative Research* 11, no. 1 (2018): 81-94.

> In considering Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies, we realize that we cannot return to or recapture a pure state of knowledge before extractive capitalism and settler colonialism. We also recognize that Indigenous cultures have always been dynamic, evolving, and adapting to change. The work of recognizing and restoring contemporary Indigenous ways of knowing is thus shaped by the existential trauma of settler colonialism.[133]

In reviewing the literature, the department may feel as though they do not yet have the knowledge or partnerships sufficient to undergo the recognition and integration of Native ways of knowing. For this, students in the department have a potential solution. In addition to crafting careful partnerships with Native-led organizations and inviting movement organizers to speak with students in the department, students suggest that the department consider cross-departmental collaborations, specifically through the approval of elective courses related to settler colonialism and Native peoples. In discussing this possibility, one student argued that the university has several resources and personnel with expertise in different areas, all of which the department has a built-in partnership with. They said "it just feels like, with social work, they're not really utilizing all of the resources that they have by being part of such a big organization, big institution. So yeah, just echoing that, we really need to have extended examples or opportunities for different electives and extend our resources a lot."

One student pointed out that this relieves pressure faculty may feel about teaching on topics with which they have limited knowledge and/or experience:

> Could we even have a course that's cross-departmental? So if it's something that is offered in a different department, but it's something that we could use to count towards our degree progress. I think that would be really important. It's not like we're asking any

[133] Clake and Yellow Bird, 80.

> of the professors to start from scratch or to teach something that they're maybe not fully equipped to do, right? They can come from a different department and from professors that maybe have more knowledge about this and can teach about it.

Faculty may also consider using teaching tools such as literature and videos by Native social workers, other human service providers, and community organizers. This action similarly decenters their own voice on the matter and makes the author or the presenter the focal point of the lesson. Students in the department reported a desire to see more literature by Native social workers throughout the curriculum. When asked to make suggestions to the department, one student said

> including more literature from the perspective of Native peoples, in particular. I think it would be helpful for there to be more about what Indigenous Social Work looks like. That's obviously really relevant to our program, and I feel like we don't. I haven't talked about that in any of my classes, and it's something that I'd be interested in learning a lot more about. Even, you know, supplemental things. I feel like we read a lot of articles in a lot of my classes as supplemental readings with our textbooks, and I think having more Native people's perspectives in that context would be super helpful.

Another student followed by simply stating "I agree. Including more literature from perspectives of Native peoples, or just Indigenous authors." In cases such as the use of Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, I commend the department on its creative use of Native literature to provide a thorough yet easily accessible case study. I would suggest a change however, due to the context in which students at DePaul are practicing. Illinois does not have federally recognized Tribes or reservation lands within its state borders (yet), so Alexie's novel does not speak to the experiences which many Natives in the city share. The department should

be more intentional about using case studies from the so-called Chicagoland area. Susan Power comes to mind as an author with which to begin seeking such material.

Bubar, Kelly, Souza, Lovato-Romero, and Bundy-Fazioli suggest a lesson utilizing a recorded lecture by a Native social worker:

> A more advanced skill includes asking social work students to view Dr. Yellowbird's 2-hour presentation titled, "Neurodecolonization and The Medicine Wheel: An Indigenous Approach to Healing the Traumas of Colonialization," which is available via YouTube. The online or in-class room discussion can then focus on inviting each student to identify two important themes from this presentation that they believe are imperative for social work practice regarding settler colonialisms impact on their work and consciousness. The course instructor can promote discussion on critical thought and self-reflectivity specific to their development as a social work practitioner.[134]

Question Academic Participation In Indigenous Dispossession[135]

The fifth challenge is appropriately the final challenge, as it is to "question how the discursive and material practices of [social work] and the academy writ large may participate in the dispossession of Indigenous peoples' land, livelihoods, and futures, and to then divest from these practices."[136] They state that there is not an easy checkbox for the questioning and divestment from practices that dispossess, but they offer that one might start with the assigned curriculum of one's departments and individual courses and assessing how relevant Native concepts and epistemologies might be engaged in ongoing research in the field.

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[134] Bubar, Kelly, Souza, Lovato-Romero, and Bundy-Fazioli, 69.

[135] Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill, 25-29.

[136] Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill, 25.

When the department has engaged meaningfully in the prior challenges, they may feel it is appropriate to offer a class housed in their own department. One student felt strongly about this suggestions, arguing that it is a necessity for social workers preparing to graduate and enter a practice field where they will very well engage with many different communities:

> I think having a full class dedicated to these topics is super important just for our own practices, right? Especially if we're going to be culturally competent social workers. Why isn't this something what we're talking about? At this point, these topics are really important to us not being able to practice to the best of our abilities and to include all people. And if we're working towards more equitable services to others like this, these are things that we need to talk about. Because it's so interwoven into our work, especially given the history of social work, and that it doesn't come from a great place, right?

To that end, they may consider also reviewing Amy Fischer Williams' dissertation *Tribal Sovereign Status: Conceptualizing Its Integration Into the Social Work Curriculum* in which she has developed a syllabus for a course she titles "Indigenous Communities and Peoples: Effective Social Work Practice."[137] This course is specifically designed to arm social workers with the knowledge of Tribal sovereignty and common experiences amongst Native peoples. Units include lessons on historical trauma, sovereignty, self-governance, cultural identity, and environmental justice.

The department may also benefit from looking to other institutional models for Native community engagement and curriculum development. For example, Northwestern University's Center for Native American and Indigenous Research or University of Illinois, Chicago's Native American Support Program. For the foundations of curriculum development, the department may

[137] Amy Fischer Williams, "Tribal Sovereign Status: Conceptualizing Its Integration Into the Social Work Curriculum," (doctoral dissertation, St. Catherine University and University of St. Thomas, 2018), 73-95.

look to the CPS American Indian Education Program, which makes several teaching tools available free of charge on their website. For a model more specific to graduate social work education, they may look to the University of Manitoba's Master of Social Work Based in Indigenous Knowledges program. It is incumbent upon the department to thoroughly review these resources and models and adjust curricula accordingly.

One last suggestion in this regard comes from a student in the department who suggested that DePaul owns a lot of land which may be surrendered to Native peoples. The department should be hard-pressed to support Native organizing to reclaim such lands if/when it occurs.

Conclusion

While it is many social workers' endeavor to help others, we are situated in structural and historical relations which privilege us with power over communities. Settler colonialism is one such structure wherein Native peoples are continuously subject to projects aimed at eliminating their existence as peoples in order to allow access to territory for settlers. Settler colonialism and its intersections with other structures such as capitalism, neoliberalism, imperialism, and heteropatriarchy foreground all social relations in the United States and are thus the stage in which policy making, institutional organizing, interpersonal interaction, and identity development play out. For these reasons, it is imperative that social work education include settler colonialism, movements to address and break it (decolonization), and the peoples most directly and negatively affected by it (Native peoples).

This study has used student focus groups to explore how the Department of Social Work at DePaul University teaches about settler colonialism, decolonization, and Native peoples. Focus group discussions have revealed a number of themes, including: a lack of structural competency wherein students are not taught to treat settler colonialism as a structure which foregrounds social relations in the US, neglect of settler colonial history wherein students are taught minimally about the history of social work as a field and even lesser still about the ways in which early social workers capitalized on their gendered settler subjectivity by perpetrating family separations and attempted assimilation of Native children, and inconsistent practices of land acknowledgement which often do not lead to more meaningful learning or action.

While these themes are troubling indeed, they are part and parcel of the social work mainstream and literature from Native social workers and Native feminist theorists provides pathways forward. Their challenges include problematizing settler colonialism and its

intersections by looking at that ways in which “proper” gender roles are enforced to further displace Native peoples for resource extraction, refusing erasure but doing more than simply including by engaging with Native communities and allowing ourselves to be changed in the wake of that engagement, crafting alliances that directly address differences by acknowledging structures of oppression and our locations therein as issues that are critical to decolonization and political work that must be addressed, recognizing Native ways of knowing as legitimate and rigorous intellectual contributions to the field of social work, and questioning academic participation in Native dispossession with the assigned curriculum of one’s departments and individual courses and assessing how relevant Native concepts and epistemologies might be engaged in ongoing research in the field.

In light of this study, the department should take these challenges to heart and consider them carefully. Some of them can be addressed immediately, while most will require small, slow, and careful work at building honest and reciprocal relationships with Native peoples in the area. Most will require vulnerable reflections on each individual student, staff, and faculty’s positionality as well as the department’s as a whole. Teaching structural competency and social work history are two excellent ways to begin teaching about settler colonialism and, through that process, begin to strengthen capacity for reflexivity. Perhaps, moving forward, graduate social work education may yet contend with harm caused by the field historically and contemporarily and graduate social work students may achieve their goals of helping individuals and communities. Perhaps, moving forward, we may yet begin to realize changed relations in a decolonized future.

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