How Minority Serving Institutions Infuse Social Justice Into Their Curriculum

Wonjen C. Bagley

Abstract: *Social work education requires students to possess knowledge of structures of oppression and discrimination, as well as the tools to dismantle practices that perpetuate power and privilege for dominant cultures. Teaching social justice in social work, while required, has not been operationalized. A dominant narrative influences teaching social justice, mostly excluding a BIPOC perspective. This preliminary study highlights how Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) infuse social justice in their curriculum. The results explore the value of social work education at MSIs, making the case for amplifying voices of the marginalized when operationalizing teaching social justice.*

Keywords: *Minority serving institutions, social justice, social work education, curriculum*

For social work programs to move towards achieving equity and justice, a collaborative approach and decolonized framework for teaching social justice must purposefully acknowledge and center community voices that have historically been devalued and exploited (Estreet et al., 2018). A greater understanding of how Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) teach social justice will help operationalize social justice education. Therefore, this research seeks to answer the question: "How do social work faculty at MSIs infuse social justice into their courses?"

Approaches to teaching social justice are concentrated on individual change with minimal attention to addressing persistent structural inequities (Corley & Young, 2018; McMahon & Allen-Meares, 1992). However, in alignment with pedagogy at MSIs, educating students on social justice calls for a curriculum centered on modern liberalism and consciousness-raising which challenges power relations that perpetuate widening economic and social gaps (Hudson, 2016; Gatenio Gabel & Mapp, 2019). In preparing students to become change agents, HBCUs celebrate silenced voices, shared history, and storytelling (Hicks Tafari et al., 2016). Anti-oppressive practices, standard in the approach at HBCUs, are negligible in methods at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs). The impactful work of HBCUs and other MSIs is undeniable, given the vast influences of many graduates and educators, but at the same time the impact is hidden and not purposely incorporated in social work education (Allen et al., 2020; Hamilton-Mason et al., 2020; Parker, 2022). The results of this preliminary study make the case for amplifying voices of the marginalized when operationalizing the teaching of social justice.

Literature Review

Minority Serving Institutions

MSIs are recognized by the Department of Interior as institutions of higher education that serve minority populations (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2019). There are 102

Wonjen C. Bagley, DSW, Assistant Professor School, College of Public Service, Tennessee State University, Nashville, TN.

Copyright © 2025 Authors, Vol. 25 No. 3 (Fall 2025), 805-822 DOI: 10.18060/28662
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), 272 Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and 35 Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs; U.S. Department of the Interior, 2019). Unlike HBCUs and TCUs, the vast majority of HSIs were not founded to serve a specific minority population. The increased presence of HSIs in the last third of the 20th century has been the result of changing demographics that led to increased populations in colleges and universities (Laden, 2004). MSIs play a critical role in educating students of color and low-income students in the United States (American Council on Education [ACE], 2021). In fact, 22% of 2019 social work baccalaureate students were enrolled at MSIs (CSWE, 2020, 2024). As American demographics become increasingly diverse, MSIs' role in educating social work students will be instrumental in shaping the field and how social workers advance social justice in their practice. While the number of Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving-Institutions (AANAPISI) have grown since their founding in 2007, the number of institutions that receive federal funding and have an accredited BSW program is significantly small and therefore not included in this preliminary study.

Teaching Social Justice in PWIs: A Review of CSWE Challenges

Social justice encompasses distributive justice and calls for structural changes to dismantle institutional racism and eliminate inequality (Hudson et al., 2017). However, the literature is unclear on what social justice means to emerging social work scholars (Hudson, 2016). Additionally, there is no operationalization of social justice work in the CSWE, Education Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), or the National Association of Social Work Code of Ethics (CSWE, 2022; NASW, 2021). Consequently, there is no clear pathway to the successful incorporation of social justice into social work education. Further, the literature offers a limited examination of the contributions MSIs have made to teaching social justice.

Current research on teaching social justice has primarily focused on White and female faculty and students (Asakura et al., 2020; Bhuyan et al., 2017; Funge et al., 2020). This conflicts with the literature supporting the view that the lived experiences and social location of educators directly affect students' experiences in the classroom (Dempsey, 2022). In addition, many students, faculty, and staff lack experiences in minority-centered spaces and are without safe spaces to process thoughts about race and racism and other social justice issues (Wagaman et al., 2019).

Furthering this disconnect, studies examining courses in social work programs have primarily focused on PWIs (Atteberry-Ash et al., 2021; Mehrotra et al., 2017, 2019). Diversity in these studies has generally been defined as regional diversity, public versus private institutions, and religious versus nonsectarian institutions (Mehrotra et al., 2017, 2019). Moreover, a culture of Whiteness is reflected in course offerings, course content, assignment construction, and inherent racialized assumptions about who clients and social workers will be in practice spaces (Gregory, 2021; Odera et al., 2021).

The literature shows a gap in historical knowledge of racial injustice and a disconnect between racial injustice and institutional racism and structural inequities (Davis, 2019; Funge et al., 2020; Gabel & Mapp, 2019; Loya, 2012). For example, Davis (2019) observes

how social workers lack historical knowledge, resulting in colorblind attitudes. Without the understanding of racism and its impact on society, the infusion of social justice in the curriculum rests on a faulty foundation. In a study on racial attitudes, 25% of surveyed social work students believed equality already existed (Loya, 2012). These findings suggest that structural racism as the root cause of racial inequality is not perceived as real, thus permitting racial discrimination to persist.

Pedagogical models exist that advise a direct approach to teaching racial justice that incorporates principles of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and liberation theory; however, many faculty report feeling ill-equipped to handle the emotional aspects around teaching about race and racism and a lack of skills and comfort (Lee et al., 2022; Perez, 2021; Wagaman et al., 2019). Furthermore, the predominant pedagogy in social justice education focuses on awareness and knowledge but pays limited attention to skill-building (Lee et al., 2022). Therefore, students are not prepared to apply what they learn or to address discriminatory practices at the micro, mezzo, or macro levels.

Pedagogy at MSIs

Teaching tenets at MSIs, such as intentionality, cultural humility, community-oriented learning, acknowledgment of historical trauma, and resilience theory, provide a path for teaching social justice to all social work students. Specifically, the Afrocentric, Latino, or Indigenous perspectives expand the Western teaching model and address Whiteness as a societal norm (Bent-Goodley et al., 2017; Franco, 2021). Expanding worldviews opens the door to restructuring social work education with an anti-oppressive lens and intersectionality as a framework. The literature shows how systems of oppression are perpetuated by omitting the presence of MSIs and the minority perspective, rendering their contributions invisible or inconsequential. This practice in scholarly publications hinders the expansion of knowledge to infuse social justice into curricula, teaching, and practice by presenting a narrow view of current teaching practices and curricula. Although there are limited studies on how MSIs infuse social justice into the curriculum, evidence suggests MSIs are intentional in their inclusion of social justice (Crewe, 2017). Social justice isn't new at HBCUs, but is recognized as part of the self-help necessary for African American survival (Bowles et al., 2016).

Additionally, literature on teaching social justice at MSIs underscores the importance of social work programs working with and within the communities they serve. As a precursor to community work or macro social work, Schiele and Jackson (2020) suggest "race work," a concept used by 19th century African American social reformers to describe the activities to counter the racial injustice that oppressed African Americans, is still relevant and visible in HBCU social work programs' partnerships with communities (Schiele & Jackson, 2020). Community work aligns with HBCUs' missions to transform urban communities and historically has been seen as a necessity in the fight against racial oppression (Schiele & Jackson, 2020; Smith et al., 2017).

The absence of pedagogy in the literature on MSIs minimizes the distinct familiarity MSIs have with social justice at the community, professional, and personal levels, thus impacting the creation of curricula tailored to train and retain students of color in the

communities they serve (Nedegaard et al., 2018). Borrowing pedagogy from PWIs leaves students unprepared and often without a clear definition of social justice (Johnston-Goodstar, 2013). An intentional approach implemented across the curriculum and championed by the faculty can not only help teach about the privilege and oppression embedded in society but also educate students to become change agents (Smith et al., 2017). The indirect approach does not acknowledge historical trauma, the complicity of the social work profession in racist practices, and the Eurocentric views that remain (Smith et al., 2017). Therefore, social work education must reinvent the curriculum centered on modern liberalism and challenge power relations that perpetuate widening economic and social gaps (Hudson, 2016).

Scholars, including those from MSIs or working with communities of color, underscore the power of social work alongside marginalized communities as an effective means for teaching social justice and dismantling racist practices in marginalized communities (Johnston-Goodstar, 2013; McBeath & Austin, 2021; Schiele & Jackson, 2020; Smith et al., 2017; Willis et al., 2019). Reliance on the community as the expert on its needs can foster and strengthen collaborations between the community and the institution, while students report both personal and professional growth (Smith et al., 2017). This contrasts with common practices at PWIs, which determine the success of community projects based on how the project contributes to students meeting their course learning objectives (Ringstad et al., 2012).

The literature on social work curricula at MSIs supports having an expanded worldview that embraces cultural history, cultural pride, and the strength of minority populations (Bent-Goodley et al., 2017; Dyson & Smith Brice, 2016; Johnston-Goodstar, 2013; Mayers et al., 2019; McLane-Davison, 2017). There is a process of learning and unlearning, summarized as a transformative approach to teaching that holds the key to addressing social inequities and oppressive conditions (Marr, 2014). This process of learning and unlearning about racism and justice intensifies awareness of hidden and explicit means by which social and structural inequities are embedded in society.

Methods

This study used qualitative methodology to explore how MSIs infuse social justice in their curricula. Our analysis focuses on the content of course syllabi, as they set the tone for classrooms and signal to instructors an openness to underrepresented students, a sense of belonging, and support for a growth mindset (Taylor et al., 2019). Given the dearth of research in this area, we decided to begin with a small-scale, qualitative, exploratory study to identify preliminary themes and patterns that could be examined quantitatively in future studies across a larger sample of institutions. A qualitative content analysis of syllabi is considered an effective means of researching teaching in social work and has been used in several recent studies (Cole, 2022; Maschi et al., 2019; Teasly & Archuleta, 2015).

Participating MSIs and Data Collection

This study's sample frame included four CSWE accredited MSIs: two HBCUs, one HSI, and one TCU. The sampling began with an internet search for BSW programs at HBCUs and HSIs. Of the eight HBCUs contacted, two agreed to participate. Two TCUs were contacted. As sovereign institutions, both TCUs had a separate internal review board (IRB) process. This researcher completed one TCU IRB process that also required obtaining a sponsor within the institution. The selected tribal college is not accredited by CSWE, but is designed as a transfer program to complete a baccalaureate degree in social work. Of the institutions in the study, two are public, and two are private. One of the institutions is religiously affiliated. Schools that did not respond to the initial email were contacted again after one week. Contact included a follow-up phone call and/or an additional email.

Data collection began only after signed consent was received from each participating school. Only undergraduate-level syllabi were requested and analyzed for this research. All included syllabi were from courses that were taught in an in-person format. Instructors were requested to send course syllabi from across the curriculum. Syllabi were collected from twelve courses from the four participating universities. Syllabi collected included core courses like Social Work Research I, Social Work in Mental Health, General Practice of Social Work II-Groups, History of Social Welfare, Social Work Policy, Human Behavior in the Social Environment, Social Work with Children and Families and Social Work in Modern Society.

Analytic Approach

The study used summative content analysis to understand the text's overall meaning and underlying meanings and patterns in documents. Given the aims and scale of this study, we elected to use a latent rather than manifest content analysis approach. Whereas manifest content analysis seeks to quantify surface-level elements of a text, such as the occurrence of specific words or phrases, latent content analysis examines the text holistically to understand underlying meanings. A qualitative content analysis approach adheres to the naturalistic paradigm in that it embraces social and historical construction and subjective interpretation of textual data (Hong & Hodge, 2009). The analysis comprised four main steps:

Step 1: Determination of Sections

Based on the consistent organization of syllabi across institutions, this researcher and the co-coder, an experienced social work faculty member and researcher, divided each syllabus into six sections. The distinct sections included the course title, course description, course objectives, text, major assignment/grading information, weekly schedule, and the reference section.

Step 2: Coding

Secondly, the researcher and co-coder used a priori keywords derived from the literature. This step aims to validate the existing theoretical framework (Hong & Hodge, 2009). Keywords from the literature on teaching social justice to social workers are social justice, oppression, diversity, policy, racial minority, social change, economic justice, and women (Hong & Hodge, 2009). The researcher and co-coder created codes using these words. However, given the study's attention to minority populations, we anticipated the need to expand codes to include words not common in the literature but found in the syllabus that specifically address minority populations. There are limited studies on syllabi from MSIs, and keywords in these institutions may vary from keywords in the literature at predominately White institutions. Keywords that may be specific to MSIs based on each institution's website may include African American/Afrocentric/Black, Latino/Hispanic/Mexican American, Native American/Indigenous populations/ Tribes, colonization/post-colonization, marginalization, discrimination, cultural competency/ culture, and anti-racist/ racism/ institutional racism/ racial disparities and intersectionality.

Observing the frequency of language used to define social justice for social work provides insight into the breadth and depth of participants' collective understanding of the concept (Hudson, 2016). Omission of social justice language could also indicate how comfortable the professor is with discussing social justice, a critical factor in preparing social work students to practice with a social justice lens (Deepak et al., 2015). However, such omissions may also reflect external constraints, including institutional or legislative pressures that influence how course content is presented in syllabi, particularly in contexts where social justice topics are politically contested.

These words and phrases served as four themes used for coding syllabi content: ethics, research, knowledge and application. Each of the six sections was analyzed and summarized in 1-2 sentences for each syllabus. The summary condensed the section and highlighted major components.

Step 3: Categorization

Thirdly, once the coding process was complete, codes were consolidated into categories (Kleinheksel et al., 2019). Categorizing codes was done by comparing them to determine which belonged together (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). A codebook, developed according to guidance from Hudson (2016) and Rapport (2010), helped organize and categorize codes into themes, and this researcher and co-coder worked together to determine themes and the meaning of themes. For example, action words and phrases such as identify, recognize, apply knowledge, and develop tools were classified under the category of application.

Step 4: Holistic Analysis and Themes

The fourth step of this summative analysis focused on examining the overall understanding of the text, uncovering underlying meanings, and identifying patterns within

the documents. This step was crucial to moving beyond surface-level content and achieving a deeper, more nuanced interpretation of the data. It facilitated the identification of categories and the exploration of their relationships (Hong & Hodge, 2009). Once categories were established, categories were analyzed regarding how they interacted, paying close attention to patterns, connections, and contradictions. The analysis aimed to identify themes that could inform the expansion of social justice education and create opportunities for applying a social justice lens, particularly in relation to the populations served by the participating MSIs. Based on the actions described in the application category, such as "recognizing mechanisms that impact oppression, marginalization, and stigmatization" and "identifying how oppressed groups, particularly African Americans, have resisted oppression and discrimination," the interpreted theme was "challenging racism in addressing social issues."

Table 1. *Themes in Social Justice-Oriented Social Work Education*

		n	
Theme	Initial codes grouped to form theme	Contributing Syllabi (*n*=12)	Transcript Excerpts (*n*=7)
Theme 1: *Challenging racism in addressing social issues*	• Connection between structural inequalities & social issues • Teaching about power & oppression • Underscoring the need for social change	10	15
Theme 2: *Historical consciousness of the BIPOC narrative & lived experience*	• Increase racial consciousness • Inclusion of an Afrocentric perspective	7	10
Theme 3: *The ethics of social justice*	• Duty of social workers to advance social justice	2	3
Theme 4: *The ethical duty of social work to respond*	• Duty of social workers to act in a social just manner	2	2

Results

Syllabi were requested from eleven minority-serving institutions with accredited BSW programs and one two-year college without an accredited BSW program. This study serves as a starting point for guidance on operationalizing the instruction of social justice in undergraduate social work courses. As seen in Table 1, four potential themes for this instruction were identified. Listed in their order of prevalence, they were challenging racism in addressing social issues, historical consciousness of the BIPOC narrative and lived experience, the ethics of social justice, and the ethical duty of social work to respond to research. Eight of the 12 syllabi (66%) referenced three of the four themes in their syllabi. All seven syllabi from HBCUs and the tribal college had at least two themes present. Six of the syllabi included the two most prevalent themes: Challenging racism in addressing social issues and historical consciousness of the BIPOC narrative and lived

experience. These findings highlight the existing foundation for social justice education in MSI social work programs and suggest a structured framework for its continued expansion.

Although the purpose of this study was not to draw conclusive comparisons, the HSIs' syllabi were found to be less likely to reference the multiple themes noted. Three of the four HSIs' syllabi had only one theme. Since the courses were selected by the participating faculty member and did not necessarily pertain to social justice, this finding raised questions about whether explicit attention to systemically minoritized groups may be more fully integrated into the curricula of the two participating HBCUs and the Tribal College.

Theme 1: Challenging Racism in Addressing Social Issues

As a prominent theme, the syllabi focused on oppression and racism, with the aim of students demonstrating knowledge of the implications of racism and the policies and practices that enforce it. While the focus on systematically minoritized groups was found in course objectives, major assignments, and the weekly schedule, themes of challenging racism in addressing social issues were most prominently found in the course objectives. In 10 of the 12 syllabi, regardless of the course topic, course objectives included recognition, identification, understanding, or applying knowledge of the prevalence of racial discrimination.

The connection between injustice, oppression, and/or discrimination and policies and practices as root causes of social issues was directly aligned in all syllabi. The unequal treatment of all persons was explicit, focusing on disparities, the historical perspectives of policies and practices that perpetuate systems of oppression, and the values of the social work profession in establishing and maintaining social and economic justice. Teaching social justice and preparing students to understand power and oppression was done through self-discovery and building knowledge of oppressive and discriminatory practices and policies. Subthemes of social action and social change were emphasized as expected skills for effective social workers and were embedded throughout the curricula.

Examples of course assignments highlighting racism and social issues included one requiring students to discuss how specific policies affect African Americans. Another example was an assignment that instructed students to analyze how social systems affected the normal growth and development of the life cycle. There were no clear guidelines or conclusions in the syllabi regarding how students should achieve justice or apply the knowledge learned and unlearned.

Theme 2: Historical Consciousness of the BIPOC Narrative and Lived Experience

Another prominent theme, historical consciousness, was embedded in all 12 syllabi. Indications of a historical consciousness were seen in the course objectives, the text, major assignments, the weekly schedule, and the reference section. Examples of infusion of historical consciousness of the BIPOC narrative and lived experience include required weekly readings at an HBCU centered on African Americans/Afro-centric values. Another assignment at an HBCU instructed students to identify how African Americans challenged

oppression and discrimination. The most frequently used teaching approach was identifying and connecting systematically marginalized groups to injustices.

Required texts by faculty members of color, weekly schedules, and reference sections that explicitly mention an Afrocentric perspective or culture were common across all syllabi. The syllabi conveyed that the cultural experiences and viewpoints of African Americans specifically were valued and centered in teaching. The lived experience of persons of color, particularly African Americans, which was most readily found in HBCU syllabi, was integrated across all subjects and served as a theoretical framework for understanding social justice and each specific subject. Notably, ethnographic and genogram assignments included in HBCU coursework serve as important components of self-actualizing racial identity, a key factor in the success of African Americans and other social work students of color at HBCUs (Darrell et al., 2016).

Theme 3: The Ethics of Social Justice

A relevant theme, however less notable than the first two themes, was the ethics of social justice. Through course objectives, assignments, and the weekly schedule, the syllabi reaffirmed the ethics of social justice as a cornerstone of the profession's primary aims. There was a conscious effort to help students understand the essential relationship between the profession's social justice mission and how matters conformed to, or did not conform to, social work's professional ethics. Although none of the courses in the study was specifically dedicated to ethics, the duty of social workers was embedded in a commitment to ethical practice, specifically related to social and economic justice and the deconstruction of policies and practices that fail to advance social justice. For instance, in the reference section, syllabi from two separate institutions included the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) Code of Ethics, in which social workers affirm their commitment to upholding the interests of Black communities.

Theme 4: The Ethical Duty of Social Work to Respond

The ethical duty of social work to respond comprises the fourth theme. This secondary theme suggests that, beyond knowledge of the profession's ethical imperative to commit to justice for everyone, social workers must also respond to unethical behavior. It is alluded to in various syllabi that in research and practice, social workers should use their knowledge of racial justice and social work ethics and respond in ways that address these injustices.

Discussion

This is a preliminary study focused on identifying initial themes which will be further developed and explored in future, larger-scale studies. Results of this study are not intended to generalize or compare syllabi at MSIs but to provide guidance for ongoing research.

To address the gaps in teaching social justice in social work, this qualitative content analysis of the syllabus at MSIs extends knowledge of the implicit and explicit curriculum. It expands knowledge of approaches to dismantle privilege and White supremacy in social

work education. In addition, syllabi at HBCUs, HSIs, and TCUs provide unique insight into the complexities of delivering social justice content through the lens of faculty, students of color, and partnerships with marginalized communities. This study has highlighted opportunities to reimagine the social work curriculum to address current social inequities.

Results from this study present an approach to teaching that is initiated before students enter the classroom and reaches beyond social work departments. It suggests a pathway toward incorporating social justice into social work education by emphasizing the need for a structured, anti-racist framework that fosters critical awareness, challenges systemic inequities, and actively resists oppression. This examination of the contributions MSIs have made toward achieving social justice is also a key finding of the study.

At HBCUs, teaching social justice is supported by and expected of all faculty (Escobar et al., 2021; Hicks Tafari et al., 2016). Accordingly, it is explicitly integrated into social work departments across the curriculum and informed by faculty's personal journeys, academic scholarship, and commitment. The institution's agreement is evident in the mission of HBCUs that the education on diversity and inclusion in the current literature is an ineffective means for dismantling privilege and White supremacy (King-Jordan & Gill, 2021). Therefore, HBCUs adopt an intentional infusion of social justice throughout their curricula, rather than the current practices at most PWIs, which rely on elective courses or minimal content within classes (Adedoyin et al., 2019).

An institutionally mission-driven approach to teaching social justice may explain the differences in teaching social work at HSIs compared to HBCUs. The establishment of HBCUs was to educate African Americans and promote the social betterment of marginalized groups, while HSIs emerged due to the growth of the Latinx population. Consequently, most HSIs are still seeking the best approaches to meet the academic needs of Latinx students (Garcia et al., 2019; Hopps et al., 2021).

In this study, HSIs have a similar approach to PWIs, focusing on diversity and inclusion and minimally focusing on the Hispanic population. Moreover, although four faculty from HSIs contributed syllabi, none was Hispanic. The lack of representation of Hispanic faculty at HSIs limits the faculty members' ability to infuse personal journeys into teaching. This lack of representation resembled the TCU in the study. While the institution was created to advance Indigenous communities, the underrepresentation of Indigenous faculty limited cultural perspectives in the curricula.

Race Consciousness in Teaching Social Justice

A key to effectively teaching social justice is to be explicit. Findings suggest that explicit attention to systemically minoritized groups is infused through the curriculum at the HBCUs that participated in the study. Courses at HBCUs are expected to adopt a race consciousness that would acknowledge racism and the journey of unlearning practices that perpetuate systems of oppression (Favaro, 2019). Furthermore, this intentional approach fosters a learning environment in which students critically examine historical and contemporary social injustices and develop the skills necessary to advocate for

marginalized communities (Bell, 2016; Freire, 1970). By embedding social justice themes into coursework, faculty at HBCUs create spaces for students to explore systemic inequities, challenge dominant narratives, and apply theory to practice (Adams et al., 2016). This approach aligns with broader efforts in social work education to cultivate culturally competent practitioners who are prepared to address structural barriers and advance equity in their professional roles (NASW, 2021).

Hicks et al. (2016) stress that even students of color and students attending HBCUs must be taught to recognize oppression and injustice in the world. Furthermore, Davis (2019) suggests that historical knowledge is directly connected with students having fewer color-blind beliefs that allow people to minimize or distort the reality of race and racism. Accordingly, syllabi in this study demonstrated an effort to raise awareness about the history of racism in America and its lasting impact on society. Additionally, syllabi at the majority of the HBCUs in the study make space for an Afrocentric perspective; a culturally grounded perspective that honors cultural values, experiences, and perspectives.

For institutions not rooted in addressing the needs of systemically marginalized populations, it is essential to offer a foundation of cultural perspectives by alternative means. For example, Curiel (2021) suggests interracial team teaching as a pedagogical approach in anti-racist social work education. Meanwhile, Beck (2019) argues that social work education must be more direct and exchange words such as "oppression" and "privilege," which are more comfortable, with the more uncomfortable phrase, "white supremacy." Ford et al. (2022) propose incorporating social work practicum education to decenter Whiteness and to implement anti-racist learning plans developed for agencies to identify goals and action steps to center Blackness. Finally, in a study on collaboration and education with Tribal colleges, Heitkamp et al. (2022) challenge social work educators to have a critical understanding of historical trauma associated with problems facing American Indians and culturally responsive programming that avoids Eurocentric pedagogy.

In each scenario, the authors suggest that social work education's path to teaching social justice requires a more profound commitment to an anti-racist approach that leans into critical, reflective awareness in which racism is named, challenged, and actively identified for resistance (Singh, 2019). Without a more thoughtful, direct, and active approach, social work education doesn't just stand still; current teaching practices perpetuate a system of oppression and White supremacy.

Implications

The urgent need for a redirection in social work education is occurring as the nation experiences a rise in hate crimes against Blacks and Asian Americans in addition to Latinos and the Jewish community (Hellyer & Gereke, 2024). Further, black males continue to face humiliation and are negatively stigmatized and dehumanized at the hands of police (Adedoyin et al., 2019). This period of racial unrest includes an aggressive attack against CRT (Crewe, 2021). A misinformation campaign targeting CRT by conservative advocates, carried out in the news media and on social media, attempts to reverse progress on dismantling systematic racism (Parrish, 2021). Parrish (2021) describes these efforts as

a "war against our professional values of racial and social justice, as well as the dignity and worth of all individuals" (p. 413). Notwithstanding this ongoing fight and opposition from the media, legislators, politicians, and school systems, social work education must leverage its rich resources to combat hate and identify the most effective methods for teaching social justice. This includes the past and present contributions of MSIs as a valuable resource.

Findings from this study offer guidance for strengthening the teaching of social justice. Examining each part of the curriculum reveals ways social justice teaching can be more effective. For example, faculty should consider decentering Whiteness in the required texts and assigned readings, major assignments, and even the references on which they build their knowledge for the course as avenues toward anti-racist teaching. Where interracial team teaching isn't an option, guest speakers who can share perspectives on the lived experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) can be invited to speak. To avoid inequities, guests need to be compensated for sharing their expertise. Articles, podcasts, or documentaries can be explicitly assigned to integrate social justice as it relates to relevant communities. Social work departments should build relationships with marginalized, under-resourced communities to remain reflective and responsible and to teach and train social workers to practice in a culturally responsive manner. To self-assess, social work departments can incorporate exercises such as a common reading for faculty development and a department-wide review of the anti-oppressive course and syllabus. Finally, embedded self-reflection for faculty and students is a necessary tool to understand positioning, privilege, and power.

Additionally, inclusion of macro social work across BSW programs in program orientation, courses, and practicum placements must be an essential component of social work rather than an outlier. Its central inclusion heightens the importance of social justice and the profession’s commitment to thinking and acting strategically to cultivate the needed systemic changes (Reisch, 2017). The future of the profession depends on its ability to lead and influence policies, programs, and practices (Reisch, 2017). Thus, a commitment to macro practice repositions social work at the table of influence, directing social policies rather than solely as recipients of policies, programs, and practices that may be contrary to the justice the profession seeks.

Strengths and Limitations

The major strength of this study is that there are few studies on teaching social justice at HBCUs, HSIs, and TCUs, and this author found none that study MSIs together in one study. The literature focuses on the operationalization of teaching social workers, but primarily at PWIs. Little attention is paid to how institutions serving systemically marginalized persons teach social justice. This preliminary study provides guidance for teaching social justice with inclusion, recognition, cultural respect, and cultural humility for voices with lived experience, and for training students to work in communities of color. The study results guide teaching social justice at the BSW level by decentering Whiteness and adopting an anti-racist pedagogy.

Limitations of this study include the reliance on syllabi to assess course social justice content. Syllabi are one-dimensional and only reveal limited knowledge of what is taught

(Mehrotra et al., 2017). A second limitation was that the TCU included in this study was not CSWE-accredited. Also, only one syllabus from one TCU was analyzed. More research is needed to determine if accredited social work programs at TCUs would produce different results. A future study of CSWE-accredited social work programs at TCUs that include Indigenous faculty would provide additional guidance on teaching social justice. A third limitation is the analytic strategy employed in the research. This study used inductive and deductive content analysis. While content analysis is frequently used to understand pedagogical approaches and student learning, researchers' knowledge, lived experiences, and values influence how the findings are interpreted (Cole, 2022; Hong & Hodge, 2009). Finally, this study served as a preliminary study that will inform future research on the topic. A larger-scale study is needed to further explore findings.

Future Studies

More research is needed to guide this discussion on teaching social justice and on how MSIs infuse it into their curricula. Several studies could be conducted to further explore models for teaching social justice in social work education at MSIs. One approach is a qualitative study with faculty at MSIs to explore what additional content could be used in the classroom to support teaching social justice. Qualitative interviews with faculty could be conducted to examine which pedagogy works best or is most frequently implemented. This study would expand on the autoethnographies of HBCU faculty and their work in preparing students to become change agents (Hicks Tafari et al., 2016). Also, this study might provide a closer look at how social justice is infused across the curriculum at MSIs.

Another future study could examine the effective implementation of social justice instruction for students attending MSIs. Pre- and post-tests before and after a semester could identify attitudes, areas for growth, and effective anti-racist teaching and learning. A future study could explore the specific social justice skills the student has developed.

Conclusion

In response to CSWE's 2022 EPAS, social work programs are seeking ways to operationalize social justice in the curriculum to ultimately teach students to be competent in anti-racist diversity, equity, and inclusion practices. Specifically, social workers are tasked with understanding the impact of White supremacy and the ways it is perpetuated in society. Revised approaches are required to face the more implicit, bolder expectations of social work programs. Without explicit, intentional efforts to towards the abolishment of racism, the ideology and practices that enable racism will perpetuate. No longer can social work education identify cultural difference without also acknowledging power, privilege, dominance, and oppression, and the patterns, policies, and structures that persist. Additionally, there is no neutrality. Practicing in ways that devalues others supports and enables a system of White supremacy.

The commitment to equity practices requires changing the ways social workers acquire and share knowledge. It requires valuation and inclusion of all voices and practices that

provide a more accurate, culturally respectful, and responsive way of teaching social justice. Ultimately it requires action.

References

Adams, M., Bell, L. A., & Griffin, P. (2016). Teaching for diversity and social justice (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Adedoyin, A. C., Moore, S. E., Robinson, M. A., Clayton, D. M., Boamah, D. A., & Harmon, D. K. (2019). The dehumanization of Black males by police: Teaching social justice - Black life really does matter! *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, *39*(2), 111-131.

Asakura, K., Strumm, B., Todd, S., & Varghese, R. (2020). What does social justice look like when sitting with clients? A Qualitative study of teaching clinical social work from a social justice perspective. *Journal of Social Work Education, 56*(3), 442-455.

Allen, W. R., Devost, A., & Mack, C. (2020). Hidden in plain sight: Historically Black colleges and universities in America. *Quaderni di Sociologia*, *83*(LXI), 25-46.

American Council on Education [ACE]. (2021). Minority Serving Institutions. *Higher Education Today*.

Atteberry-Ash, B., Nicotera, N., & Gonzales, B. (2021). Walk the talk of power, privilege, and oppression: A template analysis. *Journal of Social Work Education*, *57*(1), 7-15.

Bell, D. (2016). *Faces at the bottom of the well: The permanence of racism*. Basic Books.

Beck, E. (2019). Naming White supremacy in the social work curriculum. *Affilia*, *34*(3), 393-398.

Bent-Goodley, T., Snell, C. L., & Carlton-LaNey, I. (2017). Black perspectives and social work practice. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, *27*(1-2), 27-35.

Bhuyan, R., & Bejan, R., & Jeyapal, D. (2017). Social workers' perspectives on social justice in social work education: When mainstreaming social justice masks structural inequalities. *Social Work Education, 36,* 1-18.

Bowles, D. D., Hopps, J. G., & Clayton, O. (2016). The impact and influence of HBCUs on the social work profession. *Journal of Social Work Education*, *52*(1), 118-132.

Cole, H. L. (2022). What are we teaching in spirituality and social work elective courses? A qualitative content analysis of BSW syllabi. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought, 42*(1), 3-35.

Corley, N. A., & Young, S. M. (2018). Is social work still racist? A content analysis of recent literature. *Social Work*, *63*(4), 317-326.

Council on Social Work Education [CSWE]. (2020). *2019 statistics on social work education in the United States*. Author.

CSWE. (2022). *2022 EPAS educational policy and accreditation standards for baccalaureate and mater's social work programs*. Author.

CSWE. (2024). 2022–2023 *The state of social work education in the United States: Summary of the CSWE Annual Survey of Social Work Programs*. Author.

Crewe, S. E. (2017). Education with Intent—The HBCU experience. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 27(5), 360-366.

Crewe, S. E. (2021). Critical race theory — Uncomfortable but necessary tool for change agents. *Journal of Social Work Education*, *57*(3), 416-418.

Curiel, L. O. (2021). Interracial team teaching in social work education: A pedagogical approach to dismantling White supremacy. *Advances in Social Work*, *21*(2/3), 730-749.

Darrell, L., Littlefield, M., & Washington, E. M. (2016). Safe spaces, nurturing places. Jour*nal of Social Work Education*, *52*(1), 43-49.

Davis, A. (2019). Historical knowledge of oppression and racial attitudes of social work students. Jour*nal of Social Work Education*, *55*(1), 160-175.

Deepak, A. C., Rountree, M. A., & Scott, J. (2015). Delivering diversity and social justice in social work education: The power of context. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, *26*(2), 107-125.

Dempsey, A. (2022). Decentering whiteness in the social work classroom. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, *42*(2-3), 175-189.

Dyson, Y. D., & Smith Brice, T. (2016). Embracing the village and tribe: Critical thinking for social workers from an African-centered approach. *Journal of Social Work Education*, *52*(1), 108-117.

Erlingsson, C., & Brysiewicz, P. (2017). A hands-on guide to doing content analysis. *African Journal of Emergency Medicine*, *7*(3), 93-99.

Escobar, M., Bell, Z. K., Qazi, M., Kotoye, C. O., & Arcediano, F. (2021). Faculty time allocation at Historically Black Universities and its relationship to institutional expectations. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12,* 1-13.

Estreet, A. T., Jones, K., & Freeman, J. T. (2018). HBCUs respond: Social justice and social work education in a Trump era. *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping*, *23*(2), 35-45.

Favaro, J. (2019). Reflections of racial consciousness in social work. *Columbia Social Work Review*, *2*(1), 53-61.

Ford, A., Robbins, A., Yang, S., Bloczynski, R., & Hoffmeister, M. (2022). Tools for centering Blackness in social work field education: An anti-racist agency learning plan and evaluation. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, *42*(2-3), 207-226.

Franco, D. (2021). Revisiting cultural diversity in social work education through Latino critical race theory testimonio. *Social Work Education*, *40*(4), 522–534.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.

Funge, S. P., Crutchfield, R. M., & Jennings, L. K. (2020). The challenge of integrating social justice content into social work education: Making the abstract more concrete. *Journal of Social Work Education, 56*(1), 41-55.

Garcia, G. A., Núñez, A.-M., & Sansone, V. A. (2019). Toward a multidimensional conceptual framework for understanding "Servingness" in Hispanic-serving institutions: A synthesis of the research. *Review of Educational Research*, *89*(5), 745-784.

Gatenio Gabel, S., & Mapp, S. (2019). Teaching human rights and social justice in social work education. *Journal of Social Work Education*, *56*(3), 428-441.

Gregory, J. R. (2021). Toward a historically accountable critical whiteness curriculum for Social Work. *Advances in Social Work*, *23*(2/3), 616-635.

Hamilton-Mason, J., Wewiorski, N. J., & Tourse, R. W. C. (2020). Three pioneers at Clark-Atlanta University: Their impact on dismantling racial scaffolding. *Phylon, 57*(2), 83-104.

Hellyer, J., & Gereke, J. (2024). The shadow of fear: Hate crime victimization and stress after Charlottesville. *Frontiers in psychology*, *15*, 1-12.

Hicks Tafari, D. N., Ricks, S. A., Oates, F. B. (2016). Teaching social justice ain't easy: Stories of HBCU faculty who walk the walk. *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy, 7*(2), 15-35.

Hopps, J. G., Lowe, T. B., & Clayton, O. (2021). "I'll find a way or make one": Atlanta university and the emergence of professional social work education in the deep south. *Journal of Social Work Education*, *57*(3), 419-431.

Hong, P. Y., & Hodge, D. R. (2009). Understanding social justice in social work: A content analysis of course syllabi. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, *90*(2), 212-219.

Hudson, K. D. (2016). With equality and opportunity for all? Emerging scholars define social justice for social work. *British Journal of Social Work, 47*(7), 1959-1978.

Hudson, K. D., Shapiro, V. B., Ebiner, I. A., Berenberg, A., & Bacher, N. (2017). Preparing tomorrow's professoriate: an examination of social justice language in social work PhD program manuals. *Social Work Education*, *36*(4), 443-455.

Johnston-Goodstar, K. (2013). Indigenous youth participatory action research: Re-visioning social justice for social work with indigenous youths. *Social Work*, *58*(4), 314-320.

King-Jordan, T., & Gil, K. (2021). Dismantling privilege and white supremacy in social work education. *Advances in Social Work*, *21*(2/3), 374-395.

Kleinheksel, A. J., Rockich-Winston, N., Tawfik, H., & Wyatt, T. R. (2019). Demystifying content analysis. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, *84*(1), 127-137.

Laden, B. V. (2004). Hispanic-serving institutions: What are they? Where are they? *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *28*(3), 181-198.

Lee, E., Kourgiantakis, T., Hu, R., Greenblatt, A., & Logan, J. (2022). Pedagogical methods of teaching social justice in social work: A scoping review. *Research on Social Work Practice*, *32*(7), 762-783.

Loya, M. (2012). Racial attitudes in White social workers: Implications for culturally sensitive practice. *PB&J: Politics, Bureaucracy, and Justice*, *3*(1), 23-31.

Maschi, T., Rees, J., Leibowitz, G., & Bryan, M. (2019). Education for rights and justice: A content analysis of forensic social work syllabi. *Social Work Education*, *3*(2), 177-197.

Marr, V. L. (2014). Ditchin' the master's gardening tools for our own: Growing a womanist methodology from the grassroots. *Feminist Teacher*, *24*(1-2), 99-109.

Mayers, R. S., Cuesta, L., Davis, R., & Curran, L. (2019). Developing a program for social work with Latino populations: A case study. *Social Work Education*, *39*(4), 445-461.

Mehrotra, G. R., Hudson, K. D., & Self, J. M. (2017). What are we teaching in diversity and social justice courses? A qualitative content analysis of MSW syllabi. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, *37*(3), 218-233.

Mehrotra, G. R., Hudson, K. D., & Self, J. M. (2019). A critical examination of key assumptions underlying diversity and social justice courses in social work. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, *30*(2), 127-147.

McBeath, B., & Austin, M. J. (2021). Redesigning schools of social work into schools of Social Work and Social Justice: Opportunities for civic and organizational renewal in a justice reform environment. *Journal of Social Work Education*, *57*(sup1), 224-237.

McLane-Davison, D. (2017). Emancipatory engagement: An urban womanist social work pedagogy. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 27*(5), 474-486.

McMahon, A., & Allen-Meares, P. (1992). Is social work racist? A content analysis of recent literature. *Social Work, 37*(6), 533-539.

National Association of Social Workers. (2021). *NASW code of ethics*. Author.

Nedegaard, R. C., Barkdull, C., Weber, B. A., & Jayasundara, D. S. (2018). Lessons our BSW students taught us about teaching social work in a reservation community. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, *38*(1), 73-87.

Odera, S., Wagaman, M. A., Staton, A., Kemmerer, A. (2021). Decentering whiteness in social work curriculum: An autoethnographic reflection on a racial justice practice course. *Advances in Social Work*, *21*(2/3), 801-820.

Parker, A. (2022). Black social workers matter: Using parallel narratives to discuss social work history. *Journal of Social Work Education*, *59*(1), 255-262.

Parrish, D. E. (2021). From the editor- Critical race theory misinformation campaign: Implications for social work education. Jour*nal of Social Work Education*, *57*(3), 413-415.

Perez, E. N. (2021). Faculty as a barrier to dismantling racism in social work education. *Advances in Social Work*, *22*(2), 500-521.

Rapport, F. (2010). Summative analysis: A Qualitative method for social science and health research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *9*(3), 270-290.

Reisch, M. (2017). Why macro practice matters. *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance*, *41*(1), 6-9.

Ringstad, R., Leyva, V. L., Garcia, J., & Jasek-Rysdahl, K. (2012). Creating space for marginalized voices: Re-focusing service learning on community change and social justice. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 32(3), 268-283.

Schiele, J., & Jackson, M. (2020). The Atlanta school of social work and the professionalization of "race work." *Phylon, 57*(2), 21-40.

Singh, S. (2019). What do we know the experiences and outcomes of anti-racist social work education? An empirical case study evidencing contested engagement and transformative learning. *Social Work Education*, *38*(5), 631-653.

Smith, B. D., Marshall, I., Anderson, B. E., & Daniels, K. K. (2017). A partnership forged: BSW students and service learning at a historically black college and university (HBCU) serving urban communities. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 27*(5), 1-10.

Taylor, S. D., Veri, M. J., Eliason, M., Hermoso, J. C., Bolter, N. D., & Van Olphen, J. E. (2019). The Social justice syllabus design tool: A first step in doing social justice pedagogy. *Journal Committed to Social Change on Race and Ethnicity*, *5*(2), 132-166.

Teasly, M., & Archuleta, A. J. (2015). A review of social justice and diversity content in diversity course syllabi. *Social Work Education*, *34*(6), 607-622.

U.S. Department of the Interior. (2019). *Minority serving institutions program* [Archive]. Author.

Wagaman, M. A., Odera, S. A., & Fraser, D. V. (2019). A pedagogical model for teaching racial justice in social work education. *Journal of Social Work Education*, *55*(2), 351-362.

Willis, T. Y., Wick, D., Han, T. M., Rivera, J., & Doran, J. K. (2019). "If I did it over there, I can do it here": U.S. Latinx social work students in Costa Rican service placements deepening their professional identity and skills. *Journal of Social Work Education*, *55*(4), 710-723.

Author note: Address correspondence to Wonjen C. Bagley, Department of Social Work and Urban Studies, Tennessee State University, Nashville, TN, 37209. Email: wbagley@tnstate.edu