What happens when social work stops teaching its own history?

Remarks on the CSWE 2029 EPAS draft

School of Social Work
Arizona State University

Justin S. Harty, PhD, LCSW
Assistant Professor, School of Social Work

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A note on perspective and interpretation

- **The views shared today are my own.** They do not represent Arizona State University, the ASU School of Social Work, SSWR, the Social Welfare History Group, or any other organization I serve.
- **History is interpretation.** I draw on archival records, published scholarship and my own reading of them, and other historians may read the same evidence differently.
- **Comments on a draft.** My comments on the 2029 EPAS refer to Draft 1, released for public comment in October 2026. Later drafts may change.
- **Looking back to move forward.** I name harms done by our profession so we can learn from them to ensure we do not repeat that history.
- **Let's engage in dialogue.** My aim is to start a conversation, not to settle one.

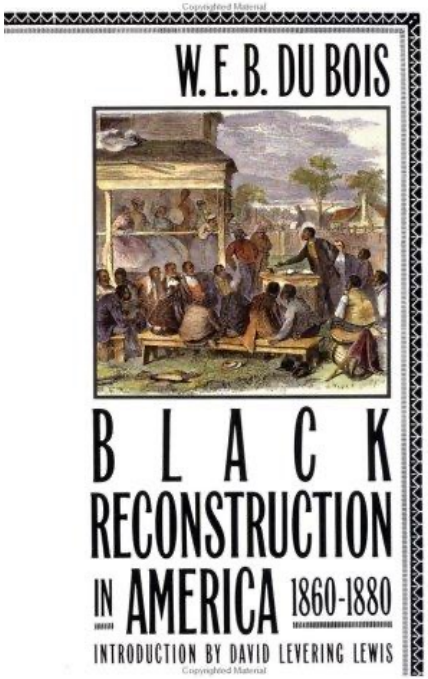
We have too often a deliberate attempt so to change the facts of history that the story will make pleasant reading for Americans.

– W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Propaganda of History,” Black Reconstruction (1935), p. 713

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History and its threats:
How a nation, and a profession, learns to forget

The propaganda of history



- Textbooks taught that Reconstruction failed because of Black people
- Facts were falsified “because the nation was ashamed” (p. 711)
- Universities, Columbia and Johns Hopkins, led the distortion
- Records were destroyed: “Alabama has tried to obliterate all printed records of Reconstruction” (p. 721)
- **You do not have to lie. You only have to stop asking.**

Du Bois, W. E. B. (1935). Black reconstruction in America, 1860–1880, ch. 17.

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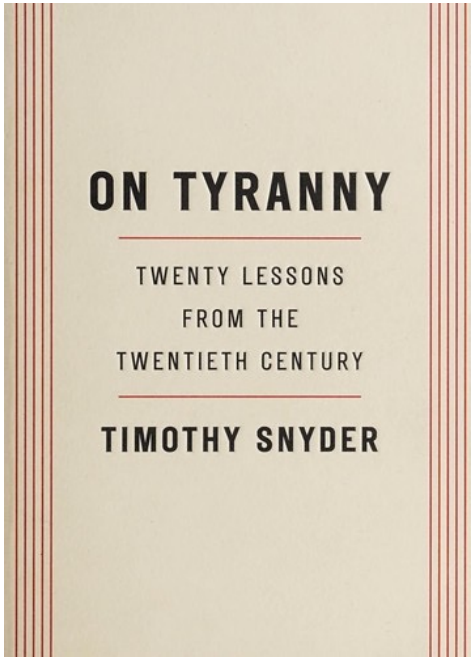
History does not repeat, but it does instruct

Timothy Snyder, On Tyranny (2017)

Lesson 1: Do not obey in advance
“Most of the power of authoritarianism is freely given.”

Lesson 2: Defend institutions
“Institutions do not protect themselves.”

Lesson 5: Remember professional ethics
“Professional ethics must guide us precisely when we are told that the situation is exceptional.”



Snyder, T. (2017). On tyranny: Twenty lessons from the twentieth century. Tim Duggan Books. Introduction; Lessons 1, 2, 5.

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Executive Order 14253 (March 27, 2025)



PRESIDENTIAL ACTIONS

RESTORING TRUTH AND SANITY TO AMERICAN HISTORY

Executive Orders | March 27, 2025

EXECUTIVE ORDER 14253

By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, it is hereby ordered:

Section 1. Purpose and Policy. Over the past decade, Americans have witnessed a concerted and widespread effort to rewrite our Nation's history, replacing objective facts with a distorted narrative driven by ideology rather than truth. This revisionist movement seeks to undermine the remarkable achievements of the United States by casting its founding principles and historical milestones in a negative light. Under this historical revision, our Nation's unparalleled legacy of advancing liberty, individual rights, and human happiness is reconstructed as inherently racist, sexist, oppressive, or otherwise irredeemably flawed. Rather than fostering unity and a deeper understanding of our shared past, the widespread effort to rewrite history deepens societal divides and fosters a sense of national shame, disregarding the progress America has made and the ideals that continue to inspire millions around the globe.

The prior administration advanced this corrosive ideology. At Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania — where our Nation declared that all men are created equal — the prior administration sponsored training by an organization that advocates dismantling "Western foundations" and "interrogating institutional racism" and pressured National Historical Park rangers that their racial identity should dictate how they convey history to visiting Americans because America is purportedly racist.

- Says history has been recast as "inherently racist, sexist, oppressive, or otherwise irredeemably flawed"
- Claims this "fosters a sense of national shame"
- Orders removal of "improper ideology" from the Smithsonian
- Monuments must not "inappropriately disparage Americans past or living"

1935: history falsified "because the nation was ashamed"
2025: critical history said to foster "national shame"

Image: The White House (2025), Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History. Exec. Order No. 14253, 90 Fed. Reg. 14563 (Apr. 3, 2025); Du Bois (1935), p. 711.

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Role of social work history: Warnings and models of courage

Our history is not pleasant reading

A profession that stops studying its past loses both

The warnings

- Eugenics
- Settlement houses that pushed assimilation
- Social workers inside Japanese American incarceration camps
- Colleagues fired during the Red Scares while our organizations distanced themselves

The models of courage

- **Black mutual aid societies**
- **The Rank and File Movement**
- **Bertha Capen Reynolds**
- **The founders of the National Association of Black Social Workers**
- **The people who said no**

NASW (2021); Park & Reisch (2022); Park (2008); SWHG (2023); Martin & Martin (1985); Leighninger & Knickmeyer (1976); Reid-Merritt (2010).

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We were already teaching less history

12.9%

Social work dissertations that were historical in the 1950s

Fisher & Dybicz (1999), Table 1

1.4%

Social work dissertations that were historical in 1995

Fisher & Dybicz (1999), Table 1

17 of 21

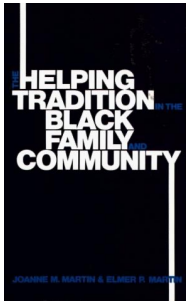
Standard social work history texts that never index “Americanization” or “assimilation”

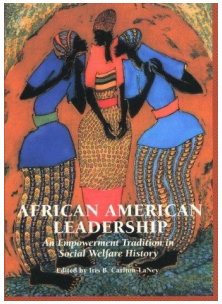
Park & Reisch (2022), p. 781

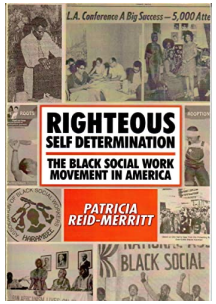
Without historical study, “old experiments are wastefully repeated.”
– Elizabeth Wisner, 1960, p. 266

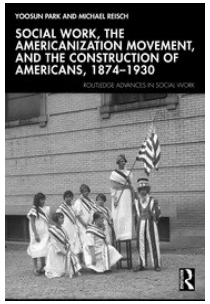
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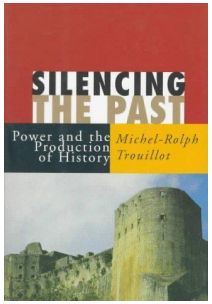
What we left out, and who is recovering it

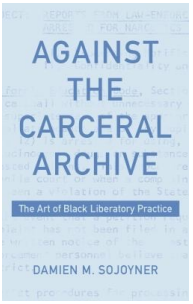












Omissions

- Welfare histories skipped the Black helping tradition
- Archives keep “records generated by powerful figures”

Decolonizing the archive

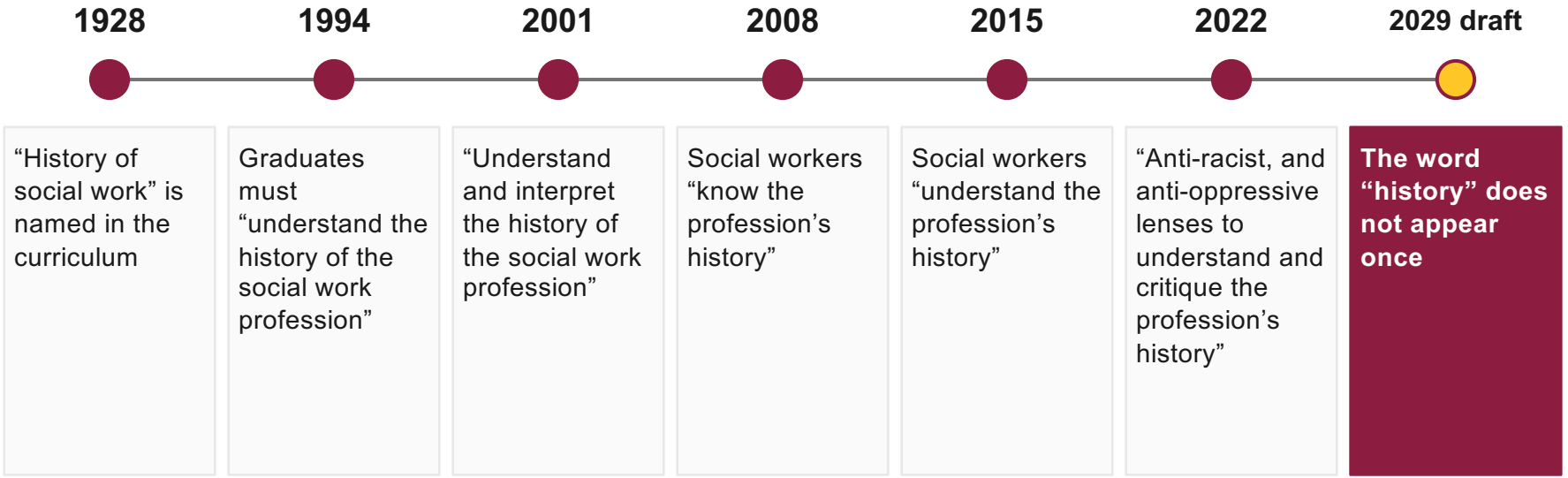
- Expand the source base
- Read records against the grain
- Center the people our systems governed

Martin & Martin (1985); Chambers (1992), p. 494; Harty, BlackDeer, & Murray (2026). Covers: Carlton-LaNey (2001); Reid-Merritt (2010); Park & Reisch (Routledge); Trouillot (1995); Sojoyner (2023).

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History in the EPAS: Nearly a century of standards, and one draft

Named in our standards since 1928



AASSW (1928); CSWE (1994, 2001, 2008, 2015, 2022); CSWE 2029 EPAS Draft 1 (2026), searched for the word “history.”

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A nod is not a requirement

What the 2029 draft keeps, and what it drops

Still in the draft

- “Historical and contemporary factors”
- Inequalities “including the social work profession’s role and response” (Competency 2)
- “Critique the historical development” of social policies (Competency 5)

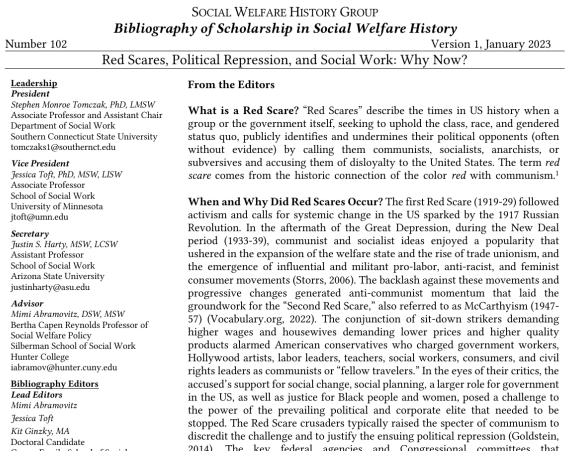
Gone from the draft

- **Any requirement to know the profession’s history**
- **Any requirement to critique the profession’s history**

CSWE 2029 EPAS Draft 1 (2026), Competencies 1, 2 and 5; CSWE 2022 EPAS, Competency 1.

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Meanwhile, history is coming back



SOCIAL WELFARE HISTORY GROUP

Bibliography of Scholarship in Social Welfare History

Number 102 Version 1, January 2023

Red Scares, Political Repression, and Social Work: Why Now?

Leadership

President

Stephen Monroe Tomczak, PhD, LMSW
Associate Professor and Assistant Chair
Department of Social Work
Southern Connecticut State University
tomczaks1@southernct.edu

Vice President

Jessica Toft, PhD, MSW, LISW
Associate Professor
School of Social Work
University of Minnesota
jtoft@umn.edu

Secretary

Justin S. Harty, MSW, LCSW
Assistant Professor
School of Social Work
Arizona State University
justinharty@asu.edu

Advisor

Mimi Abramovitz, DSW, MSW
Bertha Capen Reynolds Professor of
Social Welfare Policy
Silberman School of Social Work
Hunter College
iabramov@hunter.cuny.edu

Bibliography Editors

Lead Editors

Mimi Abramovitz

Jessica Toft

Kit Ginzky, MA
Doctoral Candidate

From the Editors

What is a Red Scare? "Red Scares" describe the times in US history when a group or the government itself, seeking to uphold the class, race, and gendered status quo, publicly identifies and undermines their political opponents (often without evidence) by calling them communists, socialists, anarchists, or subversives and accusing them of disloyalty to the United States. The term *red scare* comes from the historic connection of the color *red* with communism.[1]

When and Why Did Red Scares Occur? The first Red Scare (1919-29) followed activism and calls for systemic change in the US sparked by the 1917 Russian Revolution. In the aftermath of the Great Depression, during the New Deal period (1933-39), communist and socialist ideas enjoyed a popularity that ushered in the expansion of the welfare state and the rise of trade unionism, and the emergence of influential and militant pro-labor, anti-racist, and feminist consumer movements (Storrs, 2006). The backlash against these movements and progressive changes generated anti-communist momentum that laid the groundwork for the "Second Red Scare," also referred to as McCarthyism (1947-57) (Vocabulary.org, 2022). The conjunction of sit-down strikers demanding higher wages and housewives demanding lower prices and higher quality products alarmed American conservatives who charged government workers, Hollywood artists, labor leaders, teachers, social workers, consumers, and civil rights leaders as communists or "fellow travelers." In the eyes of their critics, the accused's support for social change, social planning, a larger role for government in the US, as well as justice for Black people and women, posed a challenge to the power of the prevailing political and corporate elite that needed to be stopped. The Red Scare crusaders typically raised the specter of communism to discredit the challenge and to justify the ensuing political repression (Goldstein, 2014). The key federal agencies and Congressional committees that

SWHG Bibliography No. 102 (2023)

CSWE

- Longstanding Social Welfare History track at APM
- *Rooted in Resilience: Honoring the Past, Grounding the Present*

SWHG

- Social Welfare History Group, born at a CSWE meeting in 1956 (70th anniversary)
- Annual bibliographies
- Webinars

SSWR

- History cluster
- Historical Research SIG
- Methods workshops
- Archivist position
- Planning history conference

What we are building

- Social Welfare History Doctoral Group
- Webinars and methods workshops

CSWE (2025), conference tracks; Fisher (1999); SSWR 2025 and 2026 programs; SWHG (2023).

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Why remove history now?

Look at what history was doing when it was kept, and when it was cut

When history was partial, it stayed

- Histories without the Black helping tradition
- Texts silent on Americanization
- Incarceration camps “occluded in its entirety from disciplinary memory”

When history became critique, it went

- **NASW apology for racist practices (2021)**
- **CSWE statement on harms to Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (2021)**
- **2022 EPAS: “critique the profession’s history”**
- **A resurgence of historical research**

Martin & Martin (1985); Park & Reisch (2022); Park (2008), p. 449; NASW (2021); Weaver et al. (2021); CSWE (2022). CSWE cites ADEI laws in 19 states (CSWE, 2026).

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Was history removed because it told an inaccurate story, or because it was finally doing its job?

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Why it belongs in the EPAS

Why keep it

- Accreditation defines what every graduate must know
- Without a standard, history survives only where a “history person” teaches it
- Apology and accountability mean little if students never learn the history

What we risk

- **Repeating harms we can no longer recognize**
- **Losing the helping traditions the official record never kept**
- **Raising what Snyder calls “a generation without history”**

Fisher & Dybicz (1999), p. 116; Murray, Harty, & Dettlaff (2026); Snyder (2017), Epilogue.

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What would historians would tell CSWE?

For the public comment, due November 20, 2026

Nations reel and stagger on their way; they make hideous mistakes; they commit frightful wrongs; they do great and beautiful things.

– W. E. B. Du Bois, Black Reconstruction (1935), p. 714

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What to tell CSWE by November 20

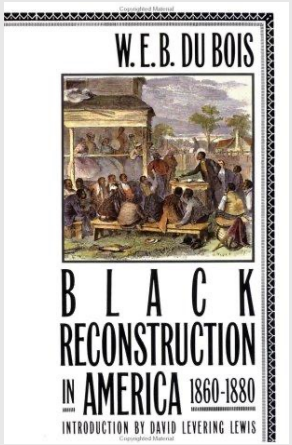
1. Comment by November 20, 2026, 11:59 PM ET at cswe.org/2029-epas

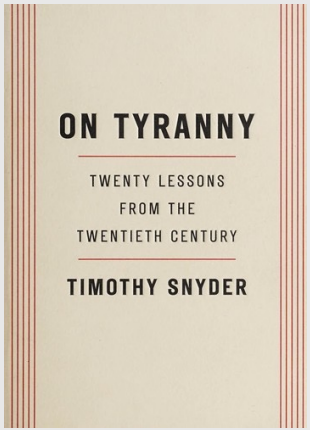
2. **Ask CSWE to restore an explicit requirement that students learn and critically examine the history of social work**

3. Talk to a social work historian or your school's archivist. We are here to help.

CSWE (2026), 2029 EPAS public comment page; de Schweinitz (1955), quoted in Fisher (1999), p. 193.

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Thank you

Questions or discussion

Justin S. Harty, PhD, MSW, LCSW

JustinHarty@asu.edu

Sankofa: we look back so we can move forward.

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