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Introduction

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The profession of social work has historically confronted many of society's most vexing social problems and challenges. Beginning at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, social work arose to confront the challenges of poverty and the destructive conditions surrounding such deprivation. Throughout the 20th century, social work expanded its scope to tackle a variety of conditions that have diminished the quality of life. These included racial disparities, mental illness, child abuse, community disorganization, and many others.

As we have entered the 21st century, there is a renewed call for the profession to once again commit itself to addressing the most pressing problems of our times. This has led to recent discussions in the field regarding the goals and aspirations that social work as a profession should commit itself to.

In this book, we will explore a number of these critical issues confronting the field. To do so, we have recruited a wide range of social work scholars and practitioners associated with the George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis. However, before we begin this examination, a bit of background is first in order.

Several years ago our school initiated a dialogue that explored what might be some of the overarching goals of social work in the years ahead. While we readily admitted that we could not speak for the profession as a whole, we did feel that we had an important voice to lend to the discussion. After a series of conversations and deliberations, we arrived at the core idea that, in our estimation, the primary concern of social work should be to ensure that every individual is able to live what we have termed a "livable life."

A livable life can be thought of as one in which individuals are able to reach their full potential and capacity. To do so, certain conditions must be met. For example, a reasonable degree of economic security needs to be present in individuals' lives. This entails having the necessary supports and resources to take care of basic needs (e.g., shelter, nutrition, safety, health, education), which

ultimately puts individuals in a better position to have the opportunity to develop their own and their children's full potential.

From our vantage point, it appeared that the goal of a livable life was becoming harder to achieve in the United States over the past decades. Greater numbers of individuals and families were struggling to reach a decent standard of living. Mounting pressures upon such families and individuals could be readily found throughout society. In short, the ability to lead a livable life was beyond the grasp for growing numbers of Americans.

This led to a further round of discussions focusing on the barriers and challenges that individuals faced in their quest to lead such a life. At the same time, the field of social work was initiating preliminary conversations regarding the "grand challenges" that social work might be facing in the years ahead. The emphasis upon grand challenges began in the professions of engineering and global health nearly 20 years ago and has since spread to many other disciplines, including social work. As a leading school of social work and knowledge builder in the field, we believed that our community could offer much in terms of helping to shape the profession's approach in defining and addressing the grand challenges.

The result of these conversations and deliberations is the book that appears before you now. Brown School faculty organized themselves into different teams to take on what we felt were the most pressing problems facing the profession and its clientele.

Tying the book together is that each of these separate challenges undercuts individuals from achieving a livable life. As we argue throughout, achieving such a life must be the ultimate goal of social work in the 21st century. Whether the focus is upon the individual, the family, the community, or the society at large, striving toward conditions in which all members of these groups can reach their full potential is paramount.

Our book examines the challenges for social work largely within the context of the United States. However, at various points throughout the chapters we reflect on the international dimension of these social issues as well. Our expertise largely falls within the domestic arena, but we feel that it is also important to be cognizant of the international scope of many of these social problems and challenges.

We begin this chapter by exploring the uniqueness of the field of social work and the guiding principles that have helped inform its understanding of the world around us. Next, we turn to an examination of the concept of livable lives. Here we will go into some detail exploring the meaning of this concept and its relevancy to social work. Finally, we conclude our discussion by outlining the overall structure of the book and the specific chapters that lie ahead.

The Social Work Approach

Since its inception, the field of social work has been referred to as "the helping profession." Over the decades, social workers have been educated and trained to confront many of society's most intractable problems and to provide help and assistance to those on the receiving end of such problems. As noted earlier, these have included poverty, discrimination, family disorganization, and a host of other economic and societal ills. In addition, social workers have been charged with addressing the root causes of these problems and, by doing so, working toward alleviating them in the first place.

In its early days, the field was closely aligned with the discipline of sociology. While sociology was viewed as providing a theoretical and research foundation for understanding various issues and problems, social work was seen as having a more applied and action-oriented approach toward these problems. Taken together, the two disciplines attempted to provide a holistic approach to many of the social problems addressed. However, as the decades passed, the two fields eventually went their own ways. Universities found that their joint departments of sociology and social work were splitting off and creating separate departments and schools, particularly during the 1920s and 1930s.

While social work continued to borrow sociological insights throughout its development, it turned to other social sciences as well, such as psychology, to inform its research and practice. Much of the clinical emphasis in social work has been built upon various theories and frameworks found within psychology and psychiatry. In addition, social welfare policy analysis has often been influenced by the methodologies and techniques found within the field of economics.

In short, social work has greatly benefited from the insights of a wide variety of academic fields. However, this has also raised the question of what precisely is unique about social work's approach for understanding and addressing social problems. Clearly one of the strengths of the profession has been its ability to draw from a wide range of fields to inform both its research and practice. Yet at the same time, this eclecticism has resulted in questions regarding the distinctiveness of the "social work" approach in understanding and improving the world around us.

We argue that today's social work is, indeed, unique in the way in which it seeks to understand and impact society at large and that there are a handful of distinctive characteristics that have largely defined the profession since its onset. They represent the essence of the social work approach. Specifically, three overriding principles epitomize the social work approach to understanding and attempting to rectify various harmful conditions for human development.

Social Justice

First, the profession has long been driven by the underlying value of social justice. Social work is not a value neutral profession, rather, it seeks to build a more socially just world than the one that we currently have. In fact, much of the original impetus behind the field was to "right" the glaring "wrongs" that social reformers were observing at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. For example, Jane Addams actively confronted the economic and social injustices that many immigrants and new arrivals faced. Such social reform is inherently built upon the value of social justice.

To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the National Council of Social Work (NASW), the academic journal, *Social Service Review,* published a special issue assessing the current state of the field. Its editor, Mark Courtney, noted, "Perhaps the most consistent theme that appears throughout this special issue is the significance to all areas of social work practice of social work's focus on achieving social justice" (2018: 495). The pursuit of social justice has been and remains a strongly embedded value that clearly defines the profession.

Of course, the question naturally arises as to what exactly is meant by "social justice." We would argue that the discussion of social justice in social work has largely revolved around two premises. First, there is the belief that everyone is entitled to certain basic human rights. These would include having access to sufficient food, shelter, health care, quality education, safe neighborhoods, a means of earning a living, and many others (e.g., see the United Nation's [2015] Universal Declaration of Human Rights). A socially just society ensures that all of its members are entitled to and able to access such necessities.

A second component of social justice emphasized in social work, and related to the first, has been the goal of leveling the playing field in order for every individual to be able to reach their full potential and capacity. Consequently, social work has emphasized the importance of reducing and eliminating the barriers that prevent such a goal. These have included poverty and economic destitution, racial and gender discrimination, economic exploitation, political power structures, and many others.

The profession has historically committed itself to reducing such barriers so that all individuals have a real opportunity at succeeding and thriving in life. This, we argue, has been a cornerstone of how social work has implemented the value of social justice. Of course, there are many other values that underlie social work practice as well, with the social work code of ethics delineating many of these. But behind each of these principles lies the central value of social justice.

In fact, the very notion of social work as a helping profession implies a social justice stance. The concept of "helping" signifies that we have a collective

responsibility to each other and that through such help we begin to create a more humane and just society. While some have shied away from the term "helping," it is, in reality, an active and engaged concept, focusing on the rights and concerns of all.

The emphasis upon social justice also allows us to distinguish the social work approach from the more value-neutral position of the various social science disciplines that social work has often drawn from. The topics that social workers study are strongly influenced by social justice concerns. Whether they be economic inequality, racial differences in incarceration rates, causes of child maltreatment, or dozens of other topics, the concern and emphasis is that by understanding these problems better, we are in a stronger position to eliminate these barriers and thereby create a better world. As Heidi Allen and colleagues note,

> the intense research and practice focus on poverty that characterizes the profession derives directly from its commitment to social justice. Social work scholars not only seek to understand the nature and causes of poverty but also have a professional mission to reduce poverty. Most students enroll in social work programs because they share this commitment to social justice and believe that training at our schools will equip them with tools to achieve that mission. (2018: 534)

Clearly then, the pursuit of social justice is a first hallmark of the social work approach.

Person-in-Environment

A second key feature of the social work approach is the importance of understanding social problems through the lens of the person-in-environment perspective. From its early origins, social workers have understood that the individual problems they were observing and wrestling with were often the result of the wider environments in which individuals and families found themselves. Such environments included the economic, social, political, and physical structures within communities. Social workers have been taught and trained over the decades to recognize the importance of these systems and the impact that they have upon those within their boundaries. The profession thus seeks to locate individual actions and behaviors within the wider environmental context.

This perspective has also been referred to as the ecological approach. Deriving from systems theory and environmental studies, it places an individual within a set of broader contexts. The result is that social work by its very nature

is interdisciplinary. As Allen points out, "leading social work scholar are not siloed—they work in interdisciplinary research teams or, at the least, draw on insights from other disciplines" (2018: 535). Consequently, social work places individual problems and concerns within wider environmental structures.

Take the case of poverty. The most common approach for understanding poverty within an American context has been through the lens of individual failure. Survey research has repeatedly demonstrated that the majority of citizens and policymakers explain poverty as the result of individual failings (Eppard, Rank, and Bullock, 2020). These include not working hard enough, poor decision-making, lack of skills and talent, and so on. As a result, the poverty stricken need to address their own shortcomings to succeed and escape impoverishment.

In contrast, the social worker using a person-in-environment or ecological perspective seeks to locate an individual's poverty within the context of the broader environments in which they reside. Consequently, what are the economic conditions and job opportunities available within the community? Have there been patterns of hiring discrimination in the past? What is the quality of the educational system in the community? Is the social safety net adequate to prevent poverty in the first place? How has the physical environment impacted the individual's well-being? All of these questions and more would naturally arise when one begins placing personal problems within the context of the person-in-environment perspective.

In addition, this perspective also recognizes the power of individuals and groups to impact their wider environments. Consequently, the person-in-environment perspective is not simply a one-directional process. As Mary Kondrat notes, it "incorporates the notion that there is a reciprocity to the person–environment relationship, such that the individual can impact the various elements of the environment, just as the environment can exert a conducive or inhibiting influence on the individual" (2008: 348).

An example of such a reciprocal process is the struggle for living wages across the United States. As a result of stagnate economic conditions and low-wage jobs, organizing efforts have occurred across many communities to fight for an increase in the minimum wage. These organizing efforts have resulted in successes and gains in many localities and states, resulting in higher minimum wages. However, some have argued that these higher minimum wages may then have the effect of employers hiring fewer workers because they feel they can no longer hire as many employees at the higher wage. This, in turn, may then impact the job opportunities available to individual workers.

This example illustrates the reciprocal process that can occur when employing the person-in-environment perspective. Such an approach provides a much deeper understanding into the dynamics of why particular problems exist and

how they might be addressed. This then represents a second hallmark of the social work approach for understanding and addressing social problems. As Kondrat concludes in her review, "to date, the principle that social work practice is characterized by a person-in-environment perspective seems to have stood the test of time" (2008: 352).

Evidence Based

A third key principle that has guided social work scholarship has been the emphasis upon evidence-based research, practice, and evaluation. Policy and practice approaches to social problems are best viewed as informed by well-constructed research designs that result in solid evidence. This evidence, in turn, should guide policy and practice approaches to such social problems.

The recent emphasis upon evidence-based practice began approximately 20 years ago in the field of medicine but quickly moved to social work as well. However, it should be noted that social work scholars and practitioners were writing about and utilizing evidence-based research for decades. For example, the work of Seebohm Rowntree in England at the beginning of the 20th century employed innovative research techniques that uncovered the prevalence of poverty across the life course. This, in turn, helped to alert practitioners in the field to the increased likelihood of poverty and economic destitution at particular stages of adulthood.

Similarly, the work of one of the key founders of social work, Mary Richmond, was instrumental in advocating for an evidence-based model. As Jeanne Marsh and Mary Bunn note,

> Mary Richmond is best known for her approach to casework, which outlined a formalized and scientific approach for direct practitioners in order to understand individuals' problems. While there are many criticisms of Richmond's model, particularly for the ways in which it emphasizes the authority and expertise of the worker and adaptation to social problems, her emphasis on defining rigorous and scientific practice methods continues to be a critical component of direct practice models today and foreshadows professional concerns with evidence-based practice in contemporary social work. (2018: 658)

During the profession's more recent development, there has also been an emphasis upon what is known as "best practices." Again, the idea is that both clinical and policy work should be informed and guided by a rigorous body of scientific research.

There is also a recognition that such research can comprise a wide variety of methodologies, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. This recognition reflects the fact that the social realities that social workers are confronting are often multidimensional. In many ways, social work has been well positioned to employ a mixed-methods approach for uncovering the patterns, causes, and consequences of social problems. Such an approach can often expose the various layers of understanding behind a particular problem or issue.

To be sure, social work has been criticized in the past for straying from these three overall principles that we have been discussing. For example, Harry Specht and Mark Courtney (1994) have argued that as a result of the push for professionalization, social work has largely abandoned its social justice perspective along with its focus on community. Conversely, those on the right have accused the profession of being driven by political correctness to the exclusion of facts and evidence.

Nevertheless, we would argue that the profession has been largely guided by these three overriding themes: (a) Social work is informed by the values of making the world a more socially just and fair place; (b) social work seeks to understand the world through the lens of the person-in-environment; and (c) social work examines, measures, evaluates, and impacts this world by evidence-based research and practice. Through researchers and practitioners engaging and emphasizing these themes, the profession seeks to achieve the goal that all members of society are able to live a livable life.

The Goal of a Livable Life

Background

Since the early 1970s, the United States has experienced growing income and wealth inequality. Nearly all of the economic gains over the last 50 years have been concentrated in the upper one-fifth of the income and wealth distributions, particularly in the upper 5 and 1 percent. Many Americans have been hard at work over the past five decades, only to find themselves falling further behind financially.

For example, median earnings of men working full-time in 1973, adjusted for inflation, stood at $55,317. By 2017, their earnings had fallen to $52,146 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). In other words, the typical male worker in the United States has actually lost ground over this time in terms of their real wages. In the United States today, 40 percent of jobs are considered low wage, that is, paying less than $16.00 an hour (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

In addition, many of these jobs have failed to provide essential benefits. Most notably, adequate and affordable health insurance through one's job has become increasingly harder to come by. Furthermore, rising numbers of Americans are working part-time jobs but would rather be working a full-time job.

Accompanying this wage stagnation has been a growing tide of individual economic risk and vulnerability. Job security has weakened, income volatility has increased, and the level of consumer debt has reached historically record levels. This increased economic vulnerability has led to social strains within families and communities.

Health is an area of particular concern. Notwithstanding significant advances and expenditures in the field of medicine, the United States lags behind the rest of the world with respect to health status. A Commonwealth Fund study (Schneider et al., 2017) finds that the quality of the American health care system ranks low in comparison to other industrialized countries. A further study has found that life expectancy has actually dropped for white males between the ages of 45 and 54 (Case and Deaton, 2015). In addition, many disadvantaged populations struggle to live healthy and productive lives due to disparities in access and delivery of medical care. Individuals with low incomes and education, or people of color, often face exceptional challenges in maintaining health and are less likely to have quality medical care.

At the same time, other aspects of the social safety net have been eroded, resulting in middle- and lower-income families facing retrenchments in social and economic protections. Cutbacks have occurred in a wide range of social programs. During this same period, public policy has exacerbated inequalities by generating large income tax cuts for the wealthy, along with highly regressive asset building subsidies for homeownership, retirement savings plans, and other social programs. Middle- and lower-income families benefit little or not at all from these massive asset building subsidies. Given this background, the ability to live a livable life has become severely strained. But what exactly is a livable life, and what conditions need to be present to achieve it?

The Meaning of a Livable Life

During the past two millenniums, there have been many attempts to delineate what comprises a fulfilling life. For Aristotle, the key to a fulfilling and satisfying life was to develop your true promise and potential. As Edith Hall writes in her book, *Aristotle's Way*, "Aristotle has more recently been reclassified as belonging to the category of utopian thinker because his works on ethics and politics assume that creating circumstances in which humans can flourish, achieve their full potential and be happy, was the goal of human life" (2018: 50). Hall goes

on to note, "A universal commitment to the full realization of human potential in the Aristotelian sense just might solve the problems today facing the human race" (41).

More recent attempts at defining a fulfilling life have included Abraham Maslov's "hierarchy of needs," Amartya Sen's "capabilities perspective," "the second generation of rights" detailed in the United Nation's (2018) Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the "concept of decency" found among many social justice advocacy organizations.

Keeping these important statements in mind, we can define a livable life as one in which an individual is able to thrive and develop in a healthy manner across their lifetime to reach their full potential. Psychological research has demonstrated that within each of us lies a variety of talents, skills, abilities, and aptitudes. In addition, we possess a wide set of personality characteristics that help us to lead fulfilling lives. A livable life is one in which these characteristics are able to flourish. As a result, the individual is able to feel a sense of purpose and fulfillment throughout their life, as well as a sense of agency and control. President John F. Kennedy summed this up succinctly in describing happiness as "the full use of your powers along lines of excellence in a life affording scope."

Of course, these abilities and aptitudes will vary widely across a population. The meaning of a livable life acknowledges and, in fact, celebrates this. The goal of a livable life is to ensure that each individual is able to fully develop their own talents and abilities. Such abilities will vary from individual to individual, but the important point is that these abilities are allowed to flourish. The well-known quote from Dr. Martin Luther King exemplifies this:

> If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as a Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, "Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well."

The concept of a livable life also overlaps with the social work value of empowerment. Social work has traditionally emphasized the goal of empowering its clientele such that they are able to exert agency over their lives. Within a livable life, the individual is, in fact, able to exert such agency over their life. Being able to both feel and actually be in control of one's destiny has been shown to be an important component of overall psychological well-being.

Also closely connected to the concept of a livable life is Amartya Sen's discussion of capabilities. According to Sen, fostering human capabilities allows "people to lead the lives they have reason to value and to enhance the real choices they have" (1999: 293). Sen notes that the goal of social policy should

be to ensure that individuals are able to develop their capabilities fully to lead such lives. As he writes, if expanding human freedom enables individuals

> to live the kind of lives that people have reason to value, then the role of economic growth in expanding these opportunities has to be integrated into that more foundational understanding of the process of development as the expansion of human capability to lead more worthwhile and more free lives (1999: 295)

Martha Nussbaum (1995) further observes that these capabilities include a wide range of attributes, including good physical and mental health, strong emotional development, creativity, a developed sense of morality, and many others.

A livable life is therefore one in which individuals can flourish in their development, exert agency over their lives, and, as a result, reach their full potential. In discussing the role of social work and social justice, Michael Reisch notes,

> At its best, social work stands for the creation of a society in which people, individually and in community, can live decent lives and realize their full human potential. This requires us to advocate for the elimination of those policies that diminish people's sense of control over their lives and drain finite resources from basic human needs. Simultaneously, we need to work for the expansion of those programs that enable people to exercise personal freedom by removing the fear of economic and physical calamity from their lives and making them feel like integral and valued parts of society. (2002: 351)

Barriers to a Livable Life

Unfortunately, many Americans as well as people around the globe have been unable to achieve a livable life. As noted earlier, the goal of a livable life appears to have become more elusive over the past decades as a result of numerous barriers. In many ways, these barriers represent the challenges confronting social work today and in the future. We might think of these barriers as falling broadly within the economic, social, political, and physical environments of society.

Perhaps most apparent would be economic insecurity, vulnerability, and poverty. As demonstrated in previous work (Rank, 2004), such conditions stunt human development, particularly for children. Conditions of economic destitution lead to increased stress and anxiety, resulting in both physical and mental health problems.

In addition, poverty and a lack of income impacts many other aspects of life that prevent people from living a livable life. For example, Sen defines poverty as a lack of freedom. In many European countries, poverty is referred to as social exclusion or social disenfranchisement. Clearly then, these conditions undermine people's ability to experience a fulfilling life.

Turning to the social environment, a myriad of barriers prevent a livable life. These include various forms of stigma and discrimination, dysfunctional family dynamics, poor-quality educational systems, cultural norms and patterns of violence, and many more. These social barriers can be found from the micro to the macro levels of society.

Barriers to achieving a livable life can be found at the political level as well. These often take the forms of various policies, programs, and laws at the federal, state, and local levels. Policies and legislation that exacerbate current inequalities quickly come to mind. They include regressive tax cuts at the top of the income distribution, criminal justice legislation targeted at minorities, current immigration policy, and recent Supreme Court decisions aimed at restricting campaign finance reform efforts. All of these exert a detrimental impact on the quality of life for many Americans.

Finally, the physical environment can also have a profound impact upon achieving a livable life. The research on environmental justice has demonstrated that those with lower incomes and people of color are much more likely to be exposed to environmental toxins. Likewise, such individuals face a greater risk of encountering various forms of violence in their communities. Within an international context, global warming and climate change are likely to disproportionally affect the world's lower-income populations in a negative manner. All of these environmental impacts result in serious barriers for achieving a livable life.

And, of course, the economic, social, political, and physical barriers to a livable life are often interconnected. For example, environmental degradation may lead to a worsening of economic opportunities, which, in turn, creates communities mired by social problems, resulting in punitive legislation aimed at reducing crime. Clearly then, the barriers found within the economic, social, political, and physical environments are closely interconnected.

Our chapters in the pages that follow address many of these barriers. As we have argued, they undercut the ability of individuals and families to grow and develop in settings that provide the necessary nourishment for a healthy life. They represent many of the key challenges that social work will face in the years to come. In short, they prevent human beings from achieving a livable life.

Organization

Our book is organized around ten key areas that we feel the profession of social work must focus on to allow individuals and families to lead livable lives. These include tackling the root socioeconomic determinants of ill health; alleviating poverty; confronting stigma/discrimination/social exclusion; reducing cumulative inequality; developing financial and tangible assets for lower- and moderate-income populations; preventing child maltreatment; fostering civic engagement across the life course; building healthy, diverse, and thriving communities; achieving environmental justice; and engaging older adults.

Beyond these ten, three additional initiatives are felt to be important in helping the profession achieve a livable life for all: generating effective demand and use of social services, designing and implementing policy and program innovations, and leveraging big data analytics and informatics.

Our book concludes with a final chapter written by three of the most recent deans serving the George Warren Brown School of Social Work. Their experience with the school stretches from the mid-1970s to the present time, representing nearly 50 years of experience. They were asked to apply their collective wisdom to gaze backward at the lessons learned over the previous decades and to look forward to the promises and challenges that lie ahead.

Taken together, *Toward a Livable Life* provides an in-depth exploration into this collection of social work challenges. As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, we have enlisted a wide range of faculty in the George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University to help shape and write the individual chapters addressing each of these topics. Within the school itself, faculty fall within the disciplines of social work, public health, and social policy. In addition, these faculty have been trained in a wide array of fields. They are uniformly at the cutting edges of their particular areas of expertise and represent a wealth of experience and knowledge that we are fortunate to draw upon.

Authors were charged with addressing several basic questions within their individual chapters: (1) What are the dynamics and scope of the problem; (2) why is it important to confront the problem, and how will alleviating the problem facilitate a livable life; (3) how can we understand the reasons behind the problem; and (4) in what ways can we address and potentially solve the problem? By framing the chapters around these questions, a degree of consistency and coherence is achieved across topics.

Authors were also asked to reflect on their topic areas from both a national and an international perspective. Although the primary focus is upon the United

States, contributors were encouraged to utilize international research and examples as well. Consequently, many chapters touch upon domestic and international aspects of their respective topics. Converging trends across the globe in urbanization, aging, economic inequality, and other societal patterns are an underlying motivation for addressing both domestic and international aspects of our social work topical areas. The international dimension allows the reader a comparative sense of the nature, the extent, and the depth of the problem.

Such a consideration is rooted in the notion that these obstacles are impediments to a livable life not only in the United States but also in many other societies. A solution or an innovation in one corner of the globe should be available to the profession of social work in another part of the globe. Effective interventions to complex problems are leveraged by integrating knowledge from different disciplines and from the experience of communities and practitioners around the world. The goal in examining domestic and international aspects of each of the topics is to begin a dialogue among educators, practitioners, and researchers to search for solutions and knowledge transfer—not just from the United States to other countries but also in the reverse direction to spur new social work practice here in the United States.

Finally, it is our deep hope that this book sparks an engaging discussion among social work researchers, practitioners, and students, as well as inspiring future social workers beginning the journey of making this world a better place to live. The challenges and problems facing everyday Americans and those around the world are great. It certainly does not take our book to tell you that. But we also believe that this is a very exciting time to be a social worker. We are living in a period of great change, and with such change comes the possibilities of many opportunities. The field of social work is well positioned to be an active and important player in helping to shape the trajectory of this change. As Martin Luther King observed, "let us realize that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." Social workers have traditionally been on the right side of history, with many of the issues social workers have fought for coming to fruition.

However, the future is now upon us. Social workers have both great opportunities and responsibilities for improving the living conditions of individuals, families, communities, and societies. The goal of striving for all to experience a livable life is one that is worthy of the profession in the 21st century. The challenges and barriers to such a life are daunting, but not insurmountable. It is time to focus our energy on such a mission. It is time to roll up our sleeves and get to work.

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