DOIN' THE WORK: Frontline Stories of Social Change

Black Power, Black Liberation & Social Work: Back to the Beginning of the National Association of Black Social Workers - Founder Garland Jaggers, MSW & Archivist Denise McLane-Davison, PhD, AM
Episode 38
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Shimon Cohen:

Welcome to Doin' The Work: Frontline Stories of Social Change, where we bring you stories of real people working to address real issues. I am your host, Shimon Cohen.

Shimon Cohen:

I'd like to thank the University of Tennessee Knoxville College of Social Work for being one of the sponsors of this episode. UTK has a phenomenal social work program with the opportunity to do your bachelor's, master's, and doctorate of social work online. Of course, they also have excellent classes in-person in both Knoxville and Nashville. UTK is committed to preparing social workers who will support human potential and dignity and challenge racism and all forms of oppression. Scholarships are available. Go to www.csu.utk.edu to learn more.

Shimon Cohen:

In this episode, I talk with Mr. Garland Jaggers and Dr. Denise McLane-Davison about their work with the National Association of Black Social Workers. I'm incredibly grateful for their participation in this interview. This is important history and current work, and I'm honored to amplify it on Doin' The Work.

Shimon Cohen:

Mr. Garland Jaggers is a former Professor in the Black Studies Department at the University of Detroit, and a co-founder of both Detroit's Association of Black Social Workers and the National Association of Black Social Workers.

Shimon Cohen:

Dr. Denise McLane-Davison is an Associate Professor at Morgan State University and the Founding Researcher and Archivist of the National Association of Black Social Workers. They discuss the history of NABSW, which started in 1968, soon after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., when a group of Black social workers brought up concerns of racism to the mostly white National Association of Social Workers. They took over the stage and made demands at the National Conference on Social Welfare, walked out, and decided to create their own organization.

Shimon Cohen:

Mr. Jaggers explains the main issues at the time and details the experience. Dr. Davison explains the need to center Black expertise and research, curriculum, teaching, and other forms of practice. We discuss NABSW's work of developing Black researchers and practitioners, their own code of ethics, and positions on issues such as transracial adoption and licensing.

Shimon Cohen:

Mr. Jaggers and Dr. Davison share their thoughts on the social work profession, racism, and Black liberation. They talk about their focus on the Black family and community, strengths-based liberatory approaches, and commitment to do this work "by any means necessary." I hope this conversation

inspires you to action. If you're interested in purchasing Mr. Jaggers' books, That Rare Moment in History volumes I and II, please contact Mr. Jaggers at garland_jaggers@att.net.

Shimon Cohen:

So, before we get into the episode, I'm so excited to tell you all about this episode's sponsor, Designs by Tee. Tee is a Brooklyn-based social worker who's created a line of t-shirts and accessories to disrupt places and spaces in the fashion industry. This t-shirt line is doing what no other social worker has done before, fusing creativity with art, and she's managed to create a local buzz.

Shimon Cohen:

She gives 10% of all sales towards purchasing essentials for children and families in a local shelter. She's got a social work collection, a socially conscious collection, a royalty collection, a kids' collection. You've got to check her out at designsbytee, that's T-E-E, designsbytee3.com. Check out the link in the show notes and take $5 off your next T-shirt order with the code TEEPOD5. That's T-E-E-P-O-D and the number five, TEEPOD5. Now, here's the interview.

Shimon Cohen:

So, Mr. Jaggers and Dr. Davison, thank you both so much for coming on the podcast. I am incredibly honored and privileged to have you both on here as guests.

Denise McLane-Davison:

Thank you for inviting us.

Garland Jaggers:

Thank you.

Shimon Cohen:

Absolutely. To get started, I really want to jump right in to the history of NABSW. So, I was hoping we could begin with that.

Garland Jaggers:

NABSW started 55 days after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King. It started as a result of a meeting held in Washington, DC in April, a meeting organized by the National Association of Social Workers. It was called an urban crisis meeting. There were several Blacks, including myself, attending, but it was mostly a white organization, NASW.

Garland Jaggers:

We were offended by the fact that they would call the meeting on the urban crisis and have so few Black people. So, the Blacks did get together after that, and we decided to go to San Francisco and confront NCSW on its inability to deal with the urban crisis from our perspective. That's how it started.

Denise McLane-Davison:

Founder Jaggers, would you share with our audience what NCSW was and what was their purpose?

Garland Jaggers:

NCSW, National Conference on Social Welfare was the umbrella organization for NASW of the Association of Community Organizations and other social organizations. It was just the umbrella.

Shimon Cohen:

So, what happened when you went out there and as you say confronted them on this issue?

Garland Jaggers:

Well, to make a long story short, we attempted to meet with the executives of NCSW because we wanted to, one, either get on the agenda or talk with them about the issues as we saw them. However, they refused to speak with us, so we decided to list our differences with NCSW, take over the stage on a Tuesday or Wednesday morning, issue our conditions, and walk out, and decided to form our own organization.

Shimon Cohen:

Okay. So, you listed your differences, you took over the stage, walked out, and created NABSW at that point.

Garland Jaggers:

That's the short story, yes.

Shimon Cohen:

Could you share what some of the differences were?

Garland Jaggers:

The main ones were, one, most of the topics about the urban crisis contained papers written by white folks. Not one Black person was talking about urban crisis. That did not ring the bell with us. Why is it at this time and space after the assassination of Martin Luther King are the whites still the experts on the Black crisis? That was our point.

Garland Jaggers:

Another point was who is doing the research on the Black community? Once again, the issue becomes white social workers. Another point was why don't we have members on the board of NCSW? There's only one or two, rather, and we feel that we have a right to have more on the more. The National Welfare Rights Organization was there. We insisted that they have at least one member on board of NCSW. So, those are the kinds of demands that we were putting before them, and we decided that since they were not going to respond to them and would not meet with us, we walked out and began forming our own organization.

Shimon Cohen:

So, when you're sharing that, what those issues were back then that led to the formation of NABSW, and I realize it's the short version of a long story, a lot of this is still the same way today, right?

Garland Jaggers:

That's why we're still in existence. Yes. Things have not changed that much, and we still have the same issues, except at the same time, we are dealing with issues from our standpoint of view, so that we are

making progress in that area. We're doing research on our own. We're working in the Black community. We have a national structure, and it allows us to confront other organizations from a national point of view, structurally.

Denise McLane-Davison:

I think one of the biggest things that comes through with the National Association of Black Social Workers in one of demands was that we as Black people should be able to self-define, self-name, and speak for our own selves. We were demanding that we center our own voice and expertise and concerns. So, it was, yes, we confronted this other organization because we felt that it was doing an unjust job of actually serving the Black and Brown communities, but also because we felt that these were the folks who are making policies.

Denise McLane-Davison:

These were the folks who were having the national voice but leaving us out of it, but in addition to that, one of the things that we felt very strongly about was that as you asked about what is going on now, there was a whole concern and effort to address the curriculum and to address the way social workers were being trained and educated, and that they also have representation not only in the academy, but also in nonprofit and government institutions that were serving Black communities. Yes, that sounds very families 50+ years later.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah, which I really think speaks to the entrenched white supremacy that's within the field of social work.

Denise McLane-Davison:

Yes. Some people may disagree and, actually, there was quite a ... I feel like there was a concerted effort according to the historical documents that we've kept and the work that we did with the Black Caucus, which was a journal of National Association of Black Social Workers and, actually, beginning to get those views upfront, but somewhere, it seems like around maybe late '70s, early '80s that folks stopped listening, listening to these Black voices, and those voices were drowned and put underground again.

Denise McLane-Davison:

So, one thing that I'm very conscious of and that is, is that you've had people who have continued to do this race work for all these years, but it's just a matter of who's really been amplifying those voices, how valuable have those voices been able to be and also paying attention to what the reward and consequence has looked like for people who have spoken out.

Denise McLane-Davison:

So, many people, I believe, stopped talking so much about race because they felt like it was a personal penalty to their professional career, and to what it is that they're going to gain.

Garland Jaggers:

There's one other aspect, which I want to point out and that is that the Association of Black Social Workers in Detroit, which was organized before the National Association of Black Social Workers was a Malcolm X organization. That was our thrust. We were "by any means necessary." That was our

livelihood, our way of thinking, our direction. With the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King what happened nationally in the Black community was an attraction to that assassination and the raising of Dr. Martin Luther King as the idol for the Black community.

Garland Jaggers:

That dampened our direction because that's where the Black community went in this country. I am still a Malcolm X person, but I have to go along with the young people who are more Dr. Martin Luther King in that vein. So, that is a critical point in the history of our organization that's probably overlooked in a lot of cases, but I witnessed it because I had to feel it. I was a Malcolm X guy and here comes the adoration that's due Martin Luther King came his way and the community went in that direction to a certain extent.

Denise McLane-Davison:

It sounds like, Founder Jaggers, you're saying that people went a little bit more moderate and so they weren't or they took on a different ideology because I know Whitney M. Young was a part of the NCSW conference and he was a leader there, and I know that was a source of contingency between our organization and also what he was doing with NCSW.

Garland Jaggers:

Yes, and, of course, he was the man in social work in those days. He was in-charge of the Urban League, and that was a national organization funded from different sources. Of course, he had the respect of the white community. When we approached him as Malcolmite people, that didn't sit too will, but he had to do his job, but we still come off and in my view for 50 some years now as Malcolm X folks. That's my approach.

Garland Jaggers:

Now, the organization is not totally Malcolm X, but part of it is due to the adoration that's due Martin Luther King, but his approach of turn the other cheek was not something that we were willing to tolerate or to deal with.

Denise McLane-Davison:

That's an interesting point that you make because I think that one of the concerns or one of the ... We're called the National Association of Black Social Workers, and I know you're speaking to what was happening in Detroit, which was something that you were a part of, but I know we also had the Philadelphia Chapter that was already in existence. We had the Black Catalysts that were in Chicago that were in existence. We had a group that was calling themselves the Black Social Workers that was in New York. We had another group in DC.

Denise McLane-Davison:

So, we had different pockets, St. Louis, looks like New Orleans had some groups that even out in the LA and in the Bay Area, but I guess what I want to try to emphasize is that how did you incorporate all of these different mindsets or value sets underneath this national umbrella, and was there some tension in that space?

Garland Jaggers:

I'm sure there was some tension and there continues to be tension, but the fact that we have walked away from NCSW, that we felt that we were not being heard, and that we could really build our own institution was the driving point behind what makes NABSW successful. The fact that we are building this ourselves have a total voice in it, run it, make all the rules, that is what keeps us together.

Denise McLane-Davison:

I would agree with that, that self-determination is actually actualized. I would also like to point out, I feel like in the founding, I've been a member of the organization for 34 years, but I would say in reading up the founding and serving as a historian for the organization, I am just amazed and overwhelmed by myself actually becoming very emotional at times reading so much of what was happening at that time because we as an organization weren't just in a vacuum by ourselves. We weren't the only ones.

Denise McLane-Davison:

I love that you brought up the fact that there was the Child Welfare League that was there. The fact that there was an organization I know that was addressing issues for women, and for aid, for children. Let me see. Let me make sure I get the name correct.

Garland Jaggers:

Settlement houses.

Denise McLane-Davison:

The settlement houses were there. Yes. I know there was a group that was there that was addressing the issue around immigrants at the same time, and labor that was being imported in from Mexican borders, and that they were being brought in to actually to bust the unions here in America. I'm trying to think of the name. It was a welfare organization that dealt specifically with-

Garland Jaggers:

Welfare Rights.

Denise McLane-Davison:

Yes, the Welfare Rights Organization. Yes. These were poor Black women that we were there trying to also represent. Just the fact that all of this was going on, so that gives you some context and the fact that the Kerner Commission report had already come out, and it, too, was saying, "Listen, the issue is racism. The issue is racism." This is why the cities are on fire. This is why people are mad. This is why people are demanding more. This is why there's this huge wealth gap.

Denise McLane-Davison:

The issue is racism and yet, here we are, what? 50+ years saying the issue was racism. The issue was racism. I guess I think about this so and I'm like, "Wow! What a moment to be in time where it appeared as if people were coming together," very similar to what we saw with Black Lives Matter. The issues were still the same. We were still talking about police brutality. We're still talking about right to housing, affordable housing, equitable pay, but every single solitary issue that was on the agenda in 1968 continues to be minus the pandemic right now, it appears to be what we are now coming in to a new administration having to address all over again or continue. Maybe address again is a continuum, I guess.

Garland Jaggers:

Well, let me go back to the issue of racism. That's not going back to it. Let me talk about racism. The number one mental health problem in America is white racism. That was our statement. Now, how did we deal with racism then? We approached NASW and said, "Look, from now on, we're going to charge you with dealing with the issue of racism. We don't have time because we cannot cure the problem of racism in America. It's a white problem. You deal with it, NASW."

Garland Jaggers:

Now, I don't know what they've done over the last 50 some years, but we have not heard from them, but it's not our job to deal with racism. It's NASW's job, and we put that to them, and we confronted them in New York later on with the same thing, but they did not hear us, I don't think, but our point of view was we're not going to deal with racism. Racism is not our problem. It is the problem of America. Therefore, it's up to white America to deal with the racism in this country. That was our position 50 some years ago and it's still mine.

Denise McLane-Davison:

I think also in terms of how the documents read, we were really, we, NABSW were pushing NCSW, the field of social work to actually implement democracy, to actually be who we say we are as a profession, to actually be who we say we are as a country, to actually address the issues of the poor, to actually make sure that everybody had access and we were really pushing for that.

Denise McLane-Davison:

What I hear, especially when you make the reference that to the Malcolm X, but I know it also to be with other organizations at that time including the push of the Black Panthers, and some of the intellects that were bringing up Black studies was that we're getting a little impatient. We've been having this conversation for a minute now, and we've become impatient. We're saying either move forward or we'll just build our own. We'll just step aside and do our own thing, but what we're not going to do is keep doing a dance of so-called negotiation in which we really are bargain away, are negotiating away our voice and our lives, that we will stand up for the communities that you say that you believe that you're standing up for. So, did I get that right, Founder Jaggers?

Garland Jaggers:

Perfect.

Shimon Cohen:

So, let's talk about some of the key positions of NABSW. I've read through some of the materials, of course, and we're going to get into some of that, and I think it's important, especially for young people, students who are listening to get this history, which is why I'm so grateful to have you both on here. This is really important history, especially at this moment in time.

Shimon Cohen:

I know one of the positions was around family separation, and removal versus placements within the Black community if there were going to be any child abuse issues going on or even how child abuse was defined. So, I was hoping you could talk about that as well because it's obviously, as we've been talking about, this is still happening today, and it's something we really need to talk about.

Garland Jaggers:

Well, let me refer to our first national conference, which was held in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania. The theme of that conference was the Black family. For too long, we've been told that the Black family was the source of our problem, and we know better. We know that the Black family has been the strength of our problem. So, we have always focused on the Black family over the years as the key to our survival, the key to our success, the key to our improvement.

Garland Jaggers:

So, the Black family in my mind is the beginning part of our development as a people. So, that was the issue at the very first conference in Philadelphia 50 some years ago, and it continues to be an issue for us today that Black family is important, and we are supportive of it. We want to support it in all ways possible because I think it's one of our keys.

Denise McLane-Davison:

So, family preservation is one of the things I've spoken to this at several different conferences and different places. Most people, if they've heard of NABSW refer to the transracial adoption issue, and I believe that's where you are going, Shimon. I will say that I often start with, well, family preservation is what we've always strived for, and who would not want to preserve their family? So, we were always addressing the issue that here are these outside external entities that were making it difficult for Black families to not only thrive, but were intentionally impacting and doing harm.

Denise McLane-Davison:

So, the issue around transracial adoption becomes even more of an issue where we're saying, "Why are Black kids and families being split disproportionately to any of the group?" Then when they're split, then why are they not being placed in kin, which kinship care comes out of our organization. That was something we introduced. Why isn't this happening versus taking our kids outside of our community where we believe they will be harmed emotionally and culturally, and mentally? Why aren't they being remaining? Why aren't you as an entity more focused on preserving Black families than pulling apart Black families?

Denise McLane-Davison:

So, that's the gist of it. Now, certainly, it's much deeper than that. We had people who were testifying in front of Congress. We had a huge fight. There were a lot of demands. We had position papers, many position papers that are just the issue of transracial adoption, but much of what you see now referred to as family preservation, that is a, hmm, I don't want to say distorted, but it's a little bit of a distorted view of what we present, a kinship care that those terms are coming out of our community. That also is part of that conversation.

Garland Jaggers:

The Black family needs to be defined in terms of the role of the father, the mother, the child, the family, not in terms of any other structures that you want to place on them. What are their roles in terms of their education, their development, their community involvement. All of those things have to do with the Black family, and we insist, and I keep saying we because I like to say we, but we insist that we determine what the Black family is and what its strengths are.

Garland Jaggers:

So, we don't want people, we're not going to have people telling us anything about the Black family. Don't come telling us anything that you think is true about the Black family. This comes from my father. My father taught me the lesson that the people who create problems have no idea how to solve them. Period. Those who create problem have no idea as to how to solve it. So, don't come in to my community and tell me how to solve this problem because they are cultural problems, they are language problems.

Garland Jaggers:

There's a misunderstanding. The Black community has its own language structure, and the white community has its language. We transfer between one and the other, but don't come into the community with white language trying to help us. And that's hard to understand, white language, but we understand it in the Black community, at least I understand it. The Black family is key to our success in my view.

Denise McLane-Davison:

Yeah. I want to bring up an article that Dr. Tanya Brice and I wrote. It was a book chapter, actually, The Strength of Black Families: The Elusive Ties of Perspective and Praxis in Social Work Education. That is one of the things, which we actually use the data from NABSW's expertise in terms of its research to actually talk about some of the work of Andrew Billingsley and Dr. Robert Hill to talk about the definition of what the Black family is, what the purpose and the strengths of the Black family are, and to also talk about just what you said, Founder Jaggers, which is this issue of deficit-based language that gets used to describe and define and name what a Black family is and saying, "Listen, the Black family is the strength and the core of Black civilization, and not only that, we are strong. We are resilient. We are the ones who are passing the history and the generations of knowledge from one generation to the next."

Garland Jaggers:

I like that. That's right on the mark.

Shimon Cohen:

Denise, when you were talking about family preservation, and then as you both, Mr. Jaggers, are talking about who creates the problem as you had just said, I kept thinking about mandatory reporting, this policy that puts social workers in a position that if they don't report, they're then considered unethical or in violation of this law, which is in every state, this mandatory reporting. I was wondering about NABSW's position on that.

Denise McLane-Davison:

The way we teach people, professionals to go out and actually over surveil Black communities, Black and Brown communities and poor communities, that's a curriculum issue. Then it's also built in to the structure of the public policies, social welfare policies, and the organizations that receive funding from that.

Denise McLane-Davison:

We don't like to, I mean, social workers, we love to think of ourselves as the moral profession. We are the high ground folks. We are the people who came to save the day with our wonderful capes on, but what the end of the day look like in our community, you are not saving us if we don't address the issues of poverty if you put it all on the micro, and you put it on the person versus addressing the issues of

poverty, addressing the issues of inequity, addressing the issues of discrimination, but then you want to hold my family responsible for the impact of these failed policies. That becomes, I think, the real unethical behavior that we fail to address the systems.

Denise McLane-Davison:

At one point, social workers believe that. We believe that we were change agents and that we needed to focus on the systems, and then we took the concept, the personal responsibility and we reconstituted the Elizabethan Poor Laws of shame and blame, and of the issue of the worthy poor.

Denise McLane-Davison:

So, that's when this whole conversation ... Knowing that there are certain groups that get left behind education, get left behind in terms of access to high paying jobs, where they can make living wages, this whole entire setup, yet we hold those families responsible for the impact and take our hands off of it. As a country, as social workers, we are going in and we begin to then be the people who police and surveil and punish these families for the impact of these failed policies.

Garland Jaggers:

Before I became a social worker, I was doing social work, and here's how I did it. I worked for the welfare department. They were giving me a list of things I had to check out when I interviewed a family. I went in there and checked them all off. It had nothing to do with the person. It had to do with what the agency wanted to know so they could either continue or close the case. That was all that form was about. It was a form.

Garland Jaggers:

So, the system is set up to get the information it wants in order to do what it wants to do for the family. You don't have to have a relationship with this welfare person. I worked for the welfare department before I became a social worker. All you have to do is go out there and check all these lists. It's an amazing contradiction to social work because as a social worker, I would go out and I say, "Okay. Now, let's see now. How can we get you some money?"

Garland Jaggers:

I had a guy who had a car, and the welfare department says, "Look if you have a car, you have to sell it unless it creates income."

Garland Jaggers:

So, I said, "Okay, Mr. Whatever, I want you to go out to 8 Mile and Woodward and I want you transport people from the bus stop there to the hospital if they can't get to out in Northville and charge them a dollar."

Garland Jaggers:

So, he created a business charging people whatever to go from point A to point D and the bus system would not take them there. That was my approach as a social worker to deal with this crazy form that they gave me because I live for rules and regulations that allowed me to do things besides what this form allowed me to do. That I think is social work. That is how you relate to people, but the form is not social work.

Garland Jaggers:

If I'm going in there to just check off, "How many kids do you have? Did you receive any money? Did anyone visit you overnight?" Give me a break. That's not social work. That's oppression, but that's what you have to do when you're working in that system, fill out forms, and not really have to relate to the problems of people.

Denise McLane-Davison:

I think that that's what was built in too ... Those were some of the issues that 1968 when our organization was founded, that those were some of the issues we were addressing. We were saying that the laws and the rules and the governing bodies have built in a level of oppression that is hurting our communities, and we sought to say, "If you are sincere once again about helping people, which is what your body says that it does, then you need to do something different."

Denise McLane-Davison:

When NCSW decided that they wouldn't do something different, NABSW did something different, and I know through our organization throughout the years, we've had several different child welfare agencies and organizations that have developed and continue to be in existence to address the issue of the preservation of Black families. I know that, for sure.

Garland Jaggers:

Well, here in Detroit, one of the results of our activities is the creation of Black Family Development Center here in Detroit. It has the values of family preservation that we believe in. So, we are very supportive of it, and it supports us. So, we do have some structural organizations now outside of the Black social workers that is now providing kinds of services that we believe our community deserves.

Denise McLane-Davison:

Isn't that also Alice Thompson's organization? I mean, she was a longterm member, and continues to be a longterm member of our organization. In fact, NABSW gave, I believe it was $1,000 grant. It was a seed grant for her to actually begin the organization.

Garland Jaggers:

True. True.

Shimon Cohen:

That's a really important story to have to show how these institutions have been built, that came out NABSW's work. What are some of the other key positions of NABSW?

Denise McLane-Davison:

There's so much. I think what's important, and especially I know as we begin to think about addressing, trying to build the next generation of social workers who will be responsive to the needs and the hearts and the mind, and the cultural concerns of our communities, especially the Black community, is to understand that liberation is always at the center of the Black social workers. So, I know most people refer to NASW's code of ethics, but within our code of ethics, we address liberation for the Black community.

Denise McLane-Davison:

We don't see ourselves as being codependent out other organizations and external systems that do not support the wellbeing, the liberation, the consciousness, the development, and the uplift of the Black community. I think that the fact that we state it very plainly within our code of ethics and our constitution the way it was written, and the work that we've done over the years, I think that's something that is very appealing to the next generation. I'm hearing it.

Denise McLane-Davison:

If you're looking at what's being said around Black Lives Matter, if you're looking at the issues around voting, voting suppression, and not just Black Lives Matter, but other different organizations that are saying, "Listen, we're tired of the level of oppression that is built in to these different systems." You will see that there is a coalition that resonates with what NABSW has always stood for.

Denise McLane-Davison:

I know, and I'm surprised you haven't brought up the issue of licensing because it also is a sticky point between our organization and NASW at the time. So, just to cut to it real quickly, part of the reason why we didn't want to just address licensing is because we also once again recognize that it would create an imbalance. It would create a division based on mostly race lines, and economic lines, and we also said that we recognize that it was not going to necessarily mean cultural competency, that the people who would be licensed or would have meant to be licensed wasn't necessarily what meant to be a social worker.

Denise McLane-Davison:

As you heard Founder Jaggers say, if we look back, social workers were social workers before they were called social workers. People who have the welfare of the community at heart looks very different from what we were talking about before in terms of social control agents. That looks very different from each other. So, to be licensed, we felt was like to, first of all, give power to one organization that will be able to define and say who was and who was not a social worker, but not necessarily to put the best person in our community, which could advance liberation and the welfare of the Black community.

Garland Jaggers:

There's one other aspect of licensing and that is licensing provides certain people to receive moneys as results of their ability to provide a certain kind of service. So, there's a distribution of money that goes to those who are licensed as opposed to those who are not. It was an effort in Michigan, at least, to prepare a certain group of social workers to begin to receive those moneys, which were becoming available for services beyond the psychiatrists and the psychologists. They were at first the ones who could receive money for services.

Garland Jaggers:

Then the license that provided other folks to receive moneys in particular fields of service, that was the primary thing that happened in Michigan. That's how it started. They were getting ready to have some people receive moneys for services and other not.

Denise McLane-Davison:

Once again, I think it goes back to the issue around how money is moving the issue of policy, moving who gets preferential treatment, moving who is seen as the problem and who was seen as the person able to address the problem. I think also in terms of the licensing, also, it reinforces these pathology conversations about who our community members were, and it continues to do that because in order to get paid, you got to come up with a label and a diagnosis, right?

Denise McLane-Davison:

So, that was our fear. This is written in to our literature and our research back in the '70s. This was our fear that we did not want to be defined as the problem. We were not going to be in the position to always be the client, that we had our own ways of knowing and our own solutions. We had our own programs. We had our own ... I would say I love the fact that at the first national conference of the Black social workers we weren't spending a whole bunch of time talking about what someone else was doing. We actually were talking about building a whole theory around Black personality. That's some of Founder Jaggers' work.

Denise McLane-Davison:

I mean, we actually were going out and saying, "How do we build our own institutions?" That was a huge thing for us. How do we make sure that people in our community, who work in our community understand and appreciate and value our community? This is at the core and continues to be at the core of the National Association of Black Social Workers, and I think that gets overlooked when we go in to, "Oh, transracial adoption. Oh, they just don't like white people." No, it's more complicated than that.

Denise McLane-Davison:

"Oh, licensing. Ah, they really just didn't like that organization, NASW," or we just didn't want to have, what is it? Professional. We didn't want to be professional social workers. It's so much more complicated than that.

Garland Jaggers:

Yes, and we also have a financial dimension to our organizations from day one, and that was that we wanted to make sure that our efforts, whatever they were, were financially productive for our Black community. For example, our first conferences were always held in the Black community. We held our fourth one at this university, a beautiful place. The atmosphere was so congenial. The third one was at Malcolm X College in Chicago. The second one was at the Howard University in Washington.

Garland Jaggers:

So, we had a financial dimension to all of our efforts. We were not out here by ourselves trying to do something different. We were out here trying to build not only the Black family, but the Black community. So, we had the whole picture in our focus. We just haven't accomplished it yet, but we are there. We're on our way. There is a financial dimension to our efforts, and it goes along with our efforts toward the Black family. So, you got to join the two, Black family and the Black community. That's part of our thrust.

Denise McLane-Davison:

I want to get back to some of the ethics, the ethical concerns once again that we were addressing as an organization. It's interesting the way Founder Jaggers was even talking about the way we as an organization operated within the first 10 years. We were for us by us. So, some people might call it

FUBU, right? We were making sure that we had an economic responsibility. We understood that we wanted to make sure money was being returned, spent in our community, for our community, by our community. That was huge for us.

Denise McLane-Davison:

So, one way we knew this is we were having a conference that would attract X amount of people. Those dollars should be spent in our community by our people at our restaurants. We didn't have hotels necessarily in those spaces, but as you heard Founder Jaggers say, you're hearing us talk about being at different HBCUs, being connected, Historical Black Colleges and Universities, utilizing the expertise of the people who were in academia, being in urban communities when we were going to have a conference, being close to the people.

Denise McLane-Davison:

I think that's something that's also extremely important is that how the people who were ... We understood that there were people who have been formally trained, but we also were very involved with the activists, activists that were in our communities. Laypeople who were out there on the front lines steering it up. There was a place for everybody. This collective voice was also and continues to be a strength of our organization. There was never division of just educators, just the administrators, just the laypeople. It was anybody who was here for the welfare, the betterment, the community betterment of Black communities. They were welcomed.

Denise McLane-Davison:

We also were very clear that people ... We're inclusive of people of African ancestry. Why? Because we understand what happens when the white gaze comes in. We understand what happens when people don't have a safe space to talk about what they're experiencing at their job, what they're experiencing in their community. We wanted to create a family. We continue to create a very family atmosphere and culture, a village, where we are having an exchange of ideas and strategies, and understanding what needs to happen next. So, we're very intentional about what the stance have been within our organization.

Shimon Cohen:

As we're talking, so many things that you've touched on really, to me, just drive home some stuff I think about a lot around ethics and this concept of professionalism, and it being used really as a tool to separate social workers from the community. What you're talking about is being with the community, part of the community, in the community.

Denise McLane-Davison:

Yes. We are not separate. There is a linked fate that I cannot be well if my community is not well. Therefore, I am, I am. Therefore, we are. We're very clear about that there's synergy, and that it is our responsibility as social workers who occupy different spaces to stand on behalf of our community's welfare. This is written into our code of ethics.

Garland Jaggers:

I learned after coming out of the school of social work, I was a psychiatric social worker. I learned that Freud and his stuff didn't work. So, I had to go out and create my own therapeutic in terms of how to deal with people. In many cases, I was very, very successful, but in terms of ego, id, and super ego, and

all of that stuff, fine to read, but what works in the Black community? That's what we're in the process of trying to develop.

Garland Jaggers:

What is it that works in the Black community in terms of uplifting our people? We need to codify these theories, and I've heard a lot of good papers at all Black social workers conferences, but we need to codify this stuff, put it in one place, and let the next generation of Black social workers begin to take that and use it effectively in the Black community.

Garland Jaggers:

We're at the point now of Blacks through Dr. Denise Davison that she has an archive and the process, and the students will be able to go there and learn about what happened 50 some years ago in our organization, how it was started, and all of the things that were talking about now. That is going to help the next generation of Black social workers be more founded or based in terms of how they're dealing in our community. That's the beauty of what the archive committee is all about and what the archive has to do, provide the resource, the technical, educational, intellectual resources for the next generation of Black social workers. They're doing more and more effectively in our community.

Denise McLane-Davison:

Thank you, Founder Jaggers, for saying that.

Garland Jaggers:

You're welcome.

Denise McLane-Davison:

I think that the beauty of having an archive, which you're talking about, is that it's recorded. There's a blueprint there. It provides an opportunity for intergenerational knowledge. That's why I'm just so tickled that you're on this podcast with me. I am with you. It's because it's an intergenerational knowledge and it's from the people who lived it, the people who were there, the people who have struggled in these spaces for answers.

Denise McLane-Davison:

I know we're living the age where we are fighting the culture that wants instant information and instant gratification, but as you said, we're talking about something as we said from 1968 and actually was bubbling up before '68, that we are still addressing now.

Denise McLane-Davison:

I know there's a new conversation, a new interest around African-centered social work. I'm sitting here looking at a conference brochure cover from 1994 in which we had the whole African center social work conference, but even prior to that, Dr. Aminifu Harvey, who wrote in 1977, I believe, in one of our earlier journals, the Black Caucus, about Africentric social work.

Denise McLane-Davison:

So, a lot of what seems to be new go takes us back to the bible verse of, "There's nothing new under the sun." It's not new, but at the end, we're not crazy enough to believe that the Black social workers are

the first one who got here. We've been in the '60s, right? We get to go back to Progressive Eras and back to the Antebellum and those eras, but still that this information has been written down, and we have to go back to some of the initial demands that we made as an organization of infusing this knowledge in the curriculum, and making sure that it is accessible for the next generations, and that they, too, will take this information and build upon it for the next generation and the next generation because I think that's the beauty of what it is that I feel like our organization has done so far, maybe not in a most formal way, but it's one in a major contributions that we have for some of the new organizations that are gearing towards a level of wokeness or consciousness in Black and Brown communities right now.

Denise McLane-Davison:

Also, I'm thinking about the fact that in, I believe it's around 1994, underneath Leonard Dunston's administration, that we introduced the African centered academy that Dr. Colita Fairfax is heading up right now, that that, too, has been a remarkable way of which we've tried to transfer this knowledge, to build this level of bank of knowledge and expertise around addressing issues in our community for us and by us, and the treatment, and the research, and the programs, and the institutions that need to be in place and what they would look like if they centered our level of expertise and our culture in them. So, yeah.

Garland Jaggers:

I always like to go back to my father when I talk about this because he taught me a lot. I'm the third child in a family of six. The youngest child was my sister, Jeannetta, and her job given to her by my father, was, and he would cut out all kinds of clips about Black history, and her job was to keep a record of it.

Garland Jaggers:

Now, my father taught me a lesson, and the lesson is if it's not written, you don't exist. That's why we have to write our own history. No one is going to write our history. I can write the history. So, it's our ability to write our own history becomes the building blocks of our people over time. That's why the archive committee is so important. Even the Black Lives Matter people, when they someday come to your committee and say, "Look, I got to find out about this and that," they're coming up with a lot of information that's not grounded in the history of Black people.

Garland Jaggers:

At some point, they may want to come to you and check out what our history is about or they may want to go to the Black psychologists and check out what their history is about because in the search for truth, you got to go back in to history and dig up the facts, and that's how you progress. You can't progress in a vacuum. It has to be based upon the knowledge of your people.

Garland Jaggers:

That's why the archive is so important, and I'm sure it's going to help not only Black social workers, it's going to help other people who want to know about some other dimensions in the Black community besides whatever they're about. I keep promoting you, sister, because what you're doing is so very, very, very important.

Denise McLane-Davison:

Thank you so much, Founder Jaggers. I will just say that I think the legacy, the legacy, and the institutionalization of the legacy of the National Association of Black Social Workers is so very, very

important. It certainly has helped me to not only personally, but also professionally develop to where I am now. I continue to impart that knowledge into my classrooms and in to the work and the research that I do.

Denise McLane-Davison:

It's just such a very intricate part of who I am, and I would love for the next generation to build something that outlives both of us, and all three of us, to build something where other people would go back and be able to say, "Ah, that's what was happening," and these are some of the same issues, and this is something that has already been tried. So, let's not stop from point zero, but let's pick up and learn from those lessons and move forward. So, thank you.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. As you're sharing all this important history and where you see things going and where you'd like them to go, I keep thinking about social work curriculum, and where's this at? I mean, all these programs right now are trying to figure out, well, some of them, how to be antiracist, where there's been all this work done all these years where it was like you could have just been listening to Black people, NABSW, all this time. It's frustrating and it's frustrating for students when they learn and they're like, "Why did I not get this?" So, that's a big part why I wanted to interview both of you to get this out there because what you've been doing has been here all along.

Denise McLane-Davison:

I appreciate you saying that. I actually was going back to look in some of the work that I've been writing lately and some of the work that I've been working on to elevate that voice and to say exactly what you said. We're right here. So, why then within our institutions of higher education have we been marginalized? Why has our voice been muted? Why are we having an antiracism taskforce at CSWE and several of us have to stand and step up and say, "I don't work on antiracism stuff. I actually work on race work. I actually center the strength, the strengths of the Black community, of Black voice, of Black intellect and thought, Black expertise, of Black people's way of knowing in everything I do."

Denise McLane-Davison:

So, I'm not busy chasing the conversation around antiracism. I'm busy upholding who we are as a culture and across the African diaspora. I'm busy centering that every time. So, that's where my work has been, but I'm not alone. I know I'm not alone. Yet, as I said, many of us have been marginalized, muted, told that, "That's not the way to success. You're not going to be able to sit at the table."

Denise McLane-Davison:

I think it's interesting because back in, I'm probably going to screw up the year, but I want to say '68-'69 because it was not too long after King's assassination that there was a whole conversation in the Negro Digest about Black power, and what is Black power, and is it even necessary and doesn't it exist, and so on and so forth.

Denise McLane-Davison:

One of the quotes on one of the conversations that struck me was about people who are not free seated at the table with people who are free and acting as if you have any power. So, if the only way I can be in these phases is to shrink back my culture, and my race, and the way I think, and my way of doing, and to assimilate, then that takes away my power.

Denise McLane-Davison:

So, my strength lies in who I am and my collective experiences and my collective identity with others. So, that has to be at the table. Every time I come to the space, I don't necessarily have to shout it from the top of the roofs, but it is always at the center of the way I think. This is the center of the research. It's the way I teach. It's so on and so forth.

Denise McLane-Davison:

I think that that is what happened in our profession, in our organizations, and in our classrooms. People have felt like they have not been free to exercise their power or voice and come as a whole person in that space because what has been reinforced is that that's not a ticket to success.

Shimon Cohen:

Well said, Dr. Denise, well said. Wow.

Denise McLane-Davison:

So, here we are.

Shimon Cohen:

So, let's get back to Black liberation.

Denise McLane-Davison:

So, here we find ourselves and you're not free, and you do not have free of thought. Then how do you sit there? Literally, think about that and be in a table where other people are free.

Garland Jaggers:

Well, I don't know if we have really defined freedom.

Denise McLane-Davison:

Well, come on, Baba Jaggers. I want to hear. Come on.

Garland Jaggers:

Well, the white man ain't free. He's tied to us. He's handcuffed to us. He ain't free. I don't think he wants to be free. I don't know. Have we defined freedom? America is not free. Have we ever defined it? What is this thing called free? Please help me. I'm looking for it myself. That's a whole another subject.

Denise McLane-Davison:

That's a whole 'nother section, and I also think it's an internal. It's an internal conversation of what it means to feel free, to be free, to be close to free, to be striving for free. Then what does that look like collectively?

Garland Jaggers:

My motto in terms of freedom is the eternal search for the truth, and I'm so happy to look for the truth. Wherever I find it, I keep looking because I want to know the truth. Period. I love it.

Denise McLane-Davison:

The truth has consequences.

Garland Jaggers:

Whatever. The truth is, if there's anything that is, it's the truth. I'm still hunting for it. I love it, and it's a great adventure for me in search of it.

Shimon Cohen:

Before we wrap up, let's talk about two things. Let's talk about how Black students and social workers who are listening can get involved and let's also talk about how people can support your work.

Garland Jaggers:

Well, my point of view, they can attend a National Conference of Black Social Workers, which are now on Zoom-

Denise McLane-Davison:

Virtual.

Garland Jaggers:

... a lot of literature that's available through our archives committee, including my book, and just personal contact with a member of the Association of Black Social Workers. That's the most direct way of getting in touch because it's a personal thing. It's not some enlightenment that falls upon people. It's a personal thing.

Denise McLane-Davison:

I would agree that it's very personal. So, I was a second year graduate student at the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration. My field instructor, Annette Johnson, who is now, I think she's a visiting professor at Jane Addams School of Social Work. At that point, she was part of the Chicago Public Schools Social Workers. She was the person who brought me to NABSW, Chicago ABSW chapter meeting.

Denise McLane-Davison:

I can remember very clearly coming to her office and sitting down with my syllabus and handing it over to her. It was the school social work intern, right? I'm sitting there with her and I hand her my stuff and I'm talking about my grades and what I'm interested, and I'm also a native of Chicago. She looks at me. She looked at the syllabus. She said, "This is very nice," she says, "and you really want to impact the young people in your neighborhoods and in the spaces in which you want to be, then you got to do something different."

Denise McLane-Davison:

She handed me a list of books to go and buy at the Black bookstore. Then she said, "Meet me, (whatever night it was), we have to go to this meeting." And we arrived at this community center, and I walked in, and I began to meet all these people who were Black social workers.

Denise McLane-Davison:

Keeping in mind in my class when I graduated at the University of Chicago, there were only four Black students in my whole entire cohort. Keeping in mind I had also been educated at Illinois State University. The fact that there was a whole group of Black social workers somewhere, what were they talking about? What were they doing? Who were those people? I began to meet all these folks.

Denise McLane-Davison:

Furthermore, she decided that I would co-present with her on Black youth in schools, something like that at the National Conference. We went to Boston for the conference. I will never ever forget what it meant to walk in to a huge conference room at a hotel to hear the drums playing, to see these African dancers, to see everybody dressed in all these wonderful African garb, and the room was full of nothing but Black social workers as far as I could see.

Denise McLane-Davison:

I was hooked from there out. I was like, "This is my place where I need to be. This is where I need to be with these people." I was meeting educators and people who were at other schools. I just remember feeling like it was Christmas, it was Jubilee, it was everything all at once for me. And I have not turned back. This was my home. These were the people who began to shape and helped me develop my consciousness, which was also an extension of the fact that my uncle, my maternal uncle had been a member of the Black Panthers, and my family and I, my mom and father were always taking us to ... We would listen to Operation Breadbasket because it was an operation push at the time, but in Chicago, there was always a very strong political and very conscious Black community, and these were the people that we were always hearing about, and you would go down to Operation Push and go to the different festivals.

Denise McLane-Davison:

So, this, to me, felt like home. It was an extension of who I was and my consciousness. Now, the thought that I would then have a perspective, which I could gain tools to actually help my community as a school social worker. I thought it was just phenomenal, absolutely phenomenal for me. It was my place and as I said, has continued to be my place to actually think that as a little girl from the south side of Chicago, I never met Black people who had written books. I knew they wrote books. I didn't know them personally. That's a very big difference.

Denise McLane-Davison:

It never even occurred to me. Keeping in mind also that I'm first generation in terms of of having not only one degree, two degrees or three degrees, any degrees in my immediate family. So, this is a whole new world for me. I think that knowing where I teach at right now at Morgan State University, I'm meeting many students that have a similar story, that are looking for a space to belong, a space where the conversation is not about the pathology of Black community, woe is us, how can you fix us, but what is the joy? What is the joy of being Black? Where can you say I'm Black and I'm proud? Where can you scream that from the rooftop? Where can you be authentic in your space and there's no question and you don't have to sit and explain everything? Where can you be?

Denise McLane-Davison:

That's the National Association of Black Social Workers for me. It's been that way for all these years. As I said, 34 years I can remember because of my daughter. That's how old she is and I was a new mama. That's what it continues to be for me. I want other people to catch that joy. That's what I think students

are looking for. What's going to be the difference? They're not just coming for a transaction. I pay you my money, blah, blah, blah. They want an experience. They want to grow. They want something to change as a result of them sitting and getting this education and going back in their community. They want something to be different, and they need the tools so something can be different.

Garland Jaggers:

I agree.

Shimon Cohen:

Powerful.

Denise McLane-Davison:

That's my spot on my story being a part of Black social workers. Before we go, I just want to even read the preamble of the code of ethics, so you can understand what's the difference. Oh, we don't just say we're Black because of the skin color, but we embody and we internalize the ethos that looks different and sounds different and hopefully is different. We be different. We be a part of this African space. We share the values and the culture and the spirituality and the knowledge of being in our space, and we're proud of it. We're proud. We're excited. This is our piece. This is who we are, and it has nothing to do with anybody else. We're just centering the love of self and the love of who we are. So, if I could just take a minute-

Shimon Cohen:

Oh, absolutely.

Denise McLane-Davison:

... and read that. The NABSW Code of Ethics, which was written I want to say in '68. It was right after the demands. Am I correct, Founder Jaggers?

Garland Jaggers:

It should be '69. It should be '69 coming out of the Catalysts, coming out of them. Yes.

Denise McLane-Davison:

Coming out of the Black Catalysts, yes, and that's another whole conversation. We can talk about them later. They're something else. It says, "In America today, no Black person, except the selfish or irrational, can claim neutrality in the quest for Black liberation nor fail to consider the implications of the events taking place in our society. Given the necessity for committing ourselves to the struggle for freedom, we as Black Americans practicing in the field of social welfare, set forth this statement of ideals and guiding principles.

Denise McLane-Davison:

If a sense of community awareness is a precondition for humanitarian acts, then we as Black social workers must use our knowledge of the Black community, our commitments to its self-determination, and our helping skills for the benefit of Black people as we marshal our expertise to improve the quality of life of Black people. Our activities will be guided by our Black consciousness, our determination to

protect the security of the Black community, and to serve as advocates to relieve suffering of Black people by any means necessary."

Denise McLane-Davison:

Now, it goes on and it says some other pieces, but just the preamble itself, by any means necessary... we are determined...

Garland Jaggers:

Malcolm.

Denise McLane-Davison:

...to say in our own power, self-defining, and self-knowing, self-affirming who we are on behalf of our communities.

Garland Jaggers:

Amen.

Denise McLane-Davison:

Thanks, Baba. You know I love you. I want to make sure they recorded that, they don't edit that out.

Shimon Cohen:

I'll keep that part. So, I'm going to link also to your books, Mr. Jaggers. If you maybe want to say something real briefly about the books so people know why they should check them out.

Garland Jaggers:

If you're interested in the history of the Association of Black Social Workers, part of it is contained in my book, and it's called That Rare Moment in History, and it's entitled that because Black social workers did something in '68 with Black people who are not doing prior to that, and that is they came out of an organization and they created their own organization instead of picketing, boycotting, and doing all kinds of other things, asking to be a part of the caucus. A lot of people have taken different routes, but we took the one route that was a first step toward freedom, and that's taking yourself out of the organization and creating your own. That's why it's called That Rare Moment in History. You can email me at garland_jaggers@att.net for any information about the book.

Shimon Cohen:

Absolutely. I'll put that information on the website and in the show notes, and there'll be a link directly to that email, so that people can contact you about the book. So, thank you so much. I just want to thank you, Dr. Denise, Mr. Jaggers. Thank you so much for coming on Doin' The Work and thanks for doing the work in the community.

Garland Jaggers:

Thank you for all of your work.

Denise McLane-Davison:

Thank you. Thank you for everything that you're doing to continue the legacy as a freedom fighter pushing the story out forward. Thank you for your time, Brother Shimon and to my dear Founder, Garland Jaggers of the National Association of Black Social Workers. It's been my honor and joy to be here.

Garland Jaggers:

My pleasure.

Shimon Cohen:

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