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Preface

This is a personal history of the University of Maryland School of Social Work. There are very few primary documents available. Records were not kept. I am not a disinterested outside observer but was an active participant in much of this history. I had distinct experiences and a point of view. There are gaps in this history. It is not finished and I may come back to it. Others may recall different events or have different interpretations than I offer. All I can do is present what I have done and what I think is the evidence supporting my interpretations.

Fortunately others have thought about this problem and have identified issues and suggested solutions. Ehrenreich {Ehrenreich, 1985 #916} writes about the problems of doing recent history. Among the things he notes is that not enough time has passed to have the perspective necessary for objective estimates. It is especially difficult when the historian has been a part of the events written about. He says, “Any historian is ‘biased’... But it is well to acknowledge the sources and directions of one’s biases, even if they cannot be entirely transcended” {Ehrenreich, 1985 #916, p. 159}.

Since one cannot study all of anything, there is as yet no unified theory, bias is inherent in science. All one can do is be clear about their assumptions and theories. It is also true that all theories are partial. Recent intellectual fashions have made have made writing history even more difficult. Spitzer {Spitzer, 1996 #870, p. 2} puts it succinctly, “Over the past twenty years, powerful arguments have undermined our confidence in historical objectivity, universal standards of truth, and even in ‘the viability of the search for stable and determinate meanings’.” This is the price of postmodernism which gives equal weight to all narratives. This has contributed, among other things, to a major grade inflation in social work education. Spitzer, however, believes that there is such a thing as truth. He observes that even postmodernists must resort to using truth standards if the want to refute those who would claim that World War II was a Roosevelt plot, that the Holocaust did not occur, or that 9/11 was a CIA plot. He concludes his chapter by writing, “ The decision about whether, and according to what criteria, to tell the truth

about the remote or recent past is a moral choice. To distinguish about incompatible criteria of historical truth is to clarify that choice” {Spitzer, 1996 #870, p. 12}.

My perspective in social work is to think in terms of the whole profession. Interaction is a key concept. In recent times driven partly by the needs of reimbursement social work has paid more attention to personality than its traditional function of facilitating the provision of services. The standards of science can be applied to history and practice without distorting either. To paraphrase something I learned a long time ago at the Infantry School, This is a history of the University of Maryland School of Social Work, it is not the history.