**CSWE Policy Example: In-class Exercise**

**Social Justice as Citizenship Embodiment: Considering Citizenship Quality of African American Men**

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This exercise is conducted in the first class of my MSW policy course. I have started to use a citizenship construct in order to think of social justice – to what extent are members of society able to embody their civil, political, social, and economic rights of citizenship? This idea of Citizenship Social Work is a model I have been developing and writing about, and have specifically applied to persons with past felony convictions (Toft & Reierson, In-press and online), and in Child Welfare Administration (Toft & Bibus, 2014) – both areas of social work where persons of color are over-represented.

For this exercise, I have written a shortened version of the *Citizenship Social Work* framework that students are to read before the class (see attached). Pages 3-5 of this document outline in specificity the different aspects of the four rights of citizenship (civil, political, social, and economic). In class, I use a PPT for the exercise (attached). I begin with asking students to think what the opposite of “disenfranchised” might be. It is interesting to see how difficult it is for students to conceptualize what “enfranchised” looks like. I then present the concepts of Democracy, followed by the idea of citizenship – that political belonging in our democracy is the essence of social justice.

I then pull back from citizenship in the particular to thinking about it in the larger institutions of democracy. The three “institutions” of democracy: the market, the state, and civil society (Somers, 2008) are good “container” concepts to understand major human arenas. While we tend to understand conceptually “the market” (the economy and its structures) and the “state” (the lawful enforcement of society’s rules through police, military, laws and government rules), we have less of an idea of civil society, which is where citizenship lives (Somers, 2008). This is the site of civic power, which is comprised of democratic processes (such as non-contractual relationships) and structures (such as voluntary associations and political parties). This is where citizenship is expressed as an ethic of “inclusion, membership, solidarity, and egalitarianism” (Somers, 2008, p. 41). Political organizations and general involvement, organized spiritual practices, all forms of art available to the public, neighborhood connections, and some authors contend even family are part of this realm. Political power of the people (rather than the market and state) is embodied in civil society through the creation of laws that can limit the power and reach of markets and states, and can also promote more democratic processes and positive impact within these two powerful realms to aim for social justice.

The conversation then turns to the idea of “social justice.” I facilitate an open conversation at first, to let students explore their ideas about this. Usually through this conversation, we will get to Reisch’s (2002) three articulations of social justice of strict liberal rights (freedom and pursuit of individual rights), communitarian egalitarian notions (what is best for the group, a focus on social obligation), and a combination of the two, such as articulated by Rawls. We will then turn to particular ethical “rubrics” (they often consider religious ones, NASW Code of Ethics, Universal Declaration of Human Rights). I will bring them back to the US and have them think about what is central to the US. We have a conversation about “disenfranchisement” (a more common term) and then, “enfranchisement.” This leads to the next slides about the rights of citizenship.

At this point, I will turn their attention to their reading and the matrix on the *Citizenship Social Work* handout. I do not, yet, go into great detail about the parts of each of the four rights. The point of this exercise is to raise their awareness about the four rights of citizenship and to be able to identify them when they see them. We take about five minutes discussing the different areas while we look at the matrix (this has some specifics, too). I then get them prepared to watch Michelle Alexander’s interview on the *Democracy Now* website (see the PPT slide). There are two segments to this interview. They are both excellent and could both be used. I use the first one to help introduce these ideas of systemic social injustice as it is the first class in the policy course. However, if this exercise were conducted later in the course, the second segment could be used.

The video is very powerful and Alexander does a fantastic job outlining clear rights infringements with extensive persuasive evidence. Students often have a very animated response to the injustices. As a class, I will walk through the four rights and have them talk about the injustices they saw and will end with a more generalized conversation about citizenship enfranchisement and a rhetorical question about the role of social work here to lay the groundwork for future conversations.

**References for Text and PPT:**

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