

Comments on Assimilation, Integration, Jane Addams, and Today There are problems with this paper that indicate to me it is not yet ready for publication. There are, on the other hand, some themes and issues that might be worth pursuing if more carefully developed. The distinction between assimilation and integration, for example, is a reasonable way to counterpoise a more forced and total process versus one that is more mediated by the practicalities facing newcomers and the resident population. Likewise, the distinction between the two sides of Jane Addams is also potentially fruitful: thoughtful, dedicated, respectful, and caring yet still very much committed to helping people adapt to core American values, strategies, and tactics—precisely because those will help newcomers do better in the United States at least in economic terms. The strongest promise of the paper lies with a very, very nice range of national contexts in which social workers must function. Needless to say, the strains in the social worker role receive good attention. Unfortunately, there is the other side. This is an extremely broad paper in terms of time, in terms of country, in terms of very overarching issues of immigration and immigrants, and in terms of approaches to society, its problems, and the management thereof. I find the result a bit diffuse and also a bit preachy. It is more a manifesto than an analysis. It needs to be tightened. If you do choose to pursue this, my sense is that your best bet is to reduce the discussion of the generalities of immigration which seem to keep looping around to the same very general points. Instead focus on Jane Addams as one kind of iconic social worker with, to me, a quite sensible and indeed honorable approach to helping create a milieu within which immigrants and their ‘hosts’ can each meet some of their goals—in part by simply being in contact with each other. And remember that the actual work of social work is not to contest capitalism per se, but to find ways to help people. Having created that integrated social work model that is Jane Addams, you can then contrast her with your four national examples. Talking more about the social workers themselves will help you avoid generalizing about social work. Here are a few comments along the way that may help show where I was having some qualms about your presentation. The abstract needs to be tightened but it does have the crucial points: Jane Addams remains interesting in terms of immigration and the international aspect is an interesting way to recontext her in contemporary terms. Be careful about “ethnocentric”; the word is used excessively and has become itself a kind of ethnocentric usage. It also seems to keep you from talking about class. The opening discussion of immigration across the entirety of American history is very spotty and at times puts you a bit over the edge. The idea that anti-immigration policies began with the 1882 exclusion act is simply not true. On page 3 you become overtly moralistic in talking about her “limitations.” I don’t think you need to berate her for trying to get funding to help people. Academic sociologists often drift in this direction because they think it means they are being appropriately “critical” of the system. Why would social workers latch onto that? The discussion of social work and public health is useful, e.g.,

that poverty and disease are seen as lodged in people rather than in social and environmental contexts. But, again, it is not clear what kind of “policy” and policy process you are talking about. Are social workers wedded to short-sighted policies, or just forced to deal with them because somebody else put them on the books? On page 6 at the end of your section, you revert to: “Learning English, striving toward the middle class, integrating into the larger community” as evidence of the coercive forces of assimilation. I see no reason those three prongs could not also be used to characterize integration policies and approaches—whether of the receiving society or of the immigrants themselves. At the end of page 6 and beginning of page 7, you talk about root causes. Why aren’t “helpful interventions” enough? Later on that page you say you are concerned with “radical social work perspective” but then you link it to two related but very different issues: “causes of forced migration” (which to me implies a very macro approach) and “hardships in resettlement” (which to me anyway implies a very micro client-centered practice). At the end of page 7, you reiterate that there are no clear distinctions between assimilation and integration but then you continue to counterpoise them on the next pages. This botches up the crucial part of your discussion which is about the effects of uniformity (a kind of bureaucracy of the mind) and a switch from advocating for people to receive assistance to investigating why they should not receive what are limited resources. It's not your fault, but your question of whether contemporary nations with developed economies still need the forceful version of assimilation is hard to accept given global trends toward exactly that kind of desperate cultural need for national cultural identity—and not only in the United States. On page 10, when you start making some useful points about what is the society, anchoring it to “integration” seems to me to get in the way. If the integration versus assimilation pairing is to have any use, it should certainly be that integration is about working within the system and assimilation is about thinking within the system (i.e., absorbing those core values rather than simply recognizing them so you can manage your life better). The section on international social worker views is, along with a recognition of Jane Addams as integrating the social work divide, the best part of the paper. It would be wonderful if you used some actual quotes from Jane Addams to match them against the statements from your international contingent. The direct views of these social workers are just far more compelling, and provocative, than the generalities of immigration, assimilation, and integration in America. But be very careful not to do national profiles since you only have a few scattered examples (even though they are telling ones). As you conclude, you return to the assimilation versus integration theme, but I don’t think it serves you well. Again, it seems to distract from your most interesting information about the practice of social work with immigrants (not the theory of it). Also a bit hortatory at the end. References badly need an edit.