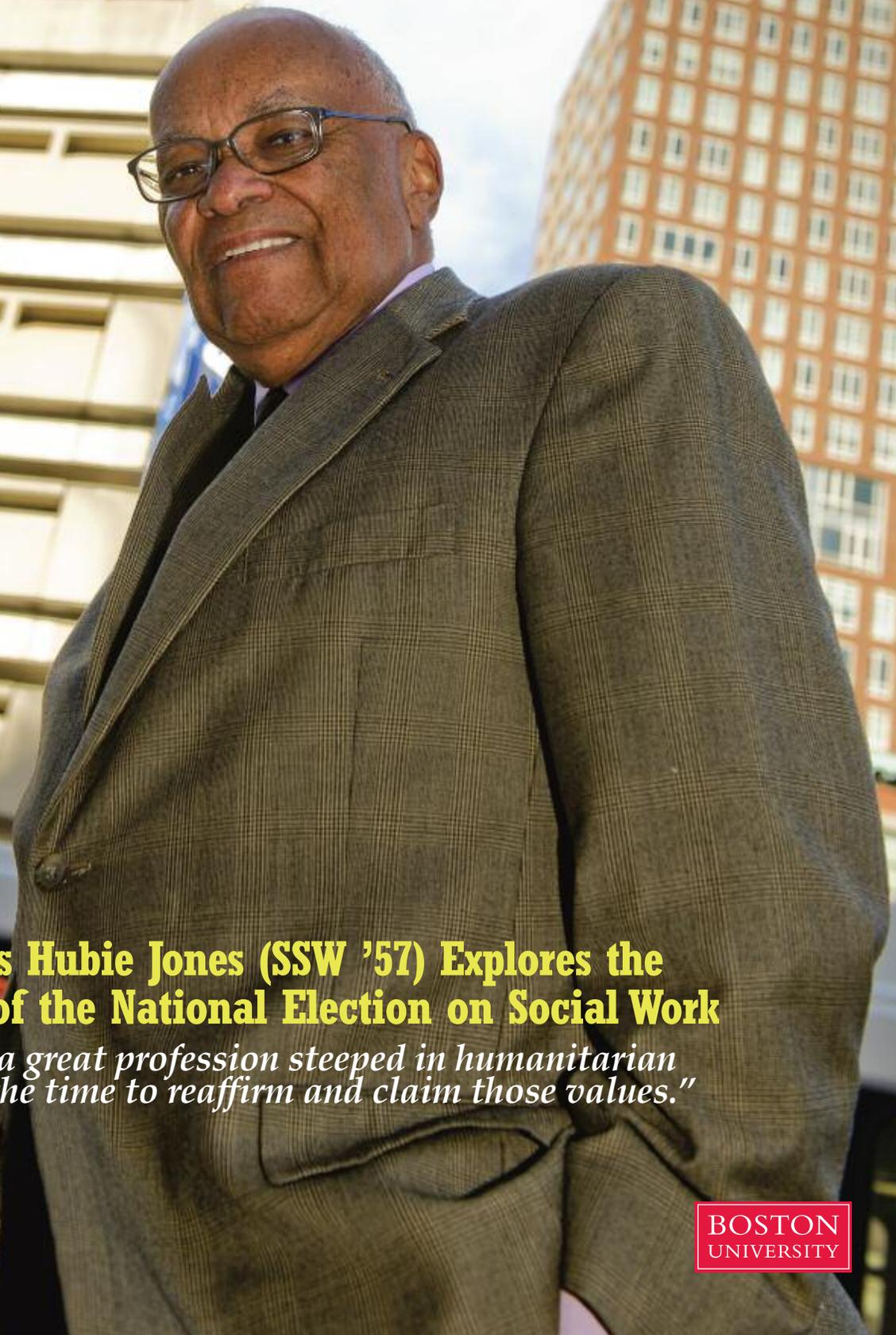


# Currents

Boston University School of Social Work



## **Dean Emeritus Hubie Jones (SSW '57) Explores the Implications of the National Election on Social Work**

*"Social work is a great profession steeped in humanitarian values. Now is the time to reaffirm and claim those values."*



## A Conversation on Community Organizing

**GREG ROSENBERG** (SSW '85)  
DISCUSSES HIS WORK IN  
COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS,  
INCLUDING HIS LATEST  
PROJECT SURROUNDING  
THE LONDON OLYMPIC SITE

### **Tell us a bit about yourself.**

I graduated from the School of Social Work in 1985 with a degree in Community Organizing, Management and Planning (COMP), with a minor in group work. I became attracted to the notion of working to change underlying social problems instead of assisting people in being better able to accommodate existing conditions. I didn't want to be a Band-Aid, I wanted to be part of the solution.

Dean Hubie Jones was a huge inspiration. My second year, I gave a speech at a student assembly about the need to improve the quality of instruction at BUSSW. Instead of reprimanding me for criticizing for his school, Dean Jones told me that I would have to do a lot better than that if I was going to be an effective community organizer. He was right, of course, and he won me over immediately. He taught me that fiery speeches without any strategy for moving things forward were empty gestures. He said real change takes time and hard work.

For more than 25 years, I have been involved in housing-related issues, albeit with a few detours. I started as an organizer in a Hyde Park neighborhood that had been torn apart by blockbusting, and I went on to spend the next 8 years of my life doing civil rights related work, primarily focusing on fair housing. Next, I went to law school to add some more tools to my toolkit, and became deeply interested in the nexus between mental health and criminal justice. I worked for a few years as an attorney representing forensic mental health patients.

After a few unexpected twists and turns, including running a Braille translation software company, I found the work that has occupied me for the past 11 years—community land trusts.

A community land trust is a nonprofit corporation that develops and stewards affordable housing, community gardens, civic buildings, commercial

spaces and other community assets on behalf of a community. “CLTs” balance the needs of individuals to access land and maintain security of tenure with a community’s need to maintain affordability, economic diversity and local access to essential services.

I was the executive director of the Madison Area Community Land Trust for nearly 10 years. As part of that work, I was the developer of Troy Gardens, a 31-acre project which includes a working farm, restored prairie, community gardens, nature trails, and a 30-unit mixed-income co-housing community—all right in the city. Though all we were trying to do at the time was implement the hopes and dreams of a neighborhood, we ended up with a project that has gotten an enormous amount of attention across the U.S., and internationally as well.

While I was working on Troy Gardens, I was also deeply involved in the founding of the National Community Land Trust Network. In 2010, I went to work for them as their first Academy Director, running national education and research programs. Recently, I joined the world of consulting (Rosenberg and Associates), and have been involved in a wide variety of projects, including mentoring, strategic planning, website design, software development, curriculum development, teaching and research. The most exciting project I’ve been involved in lately has been my work with the East London Community Land Trust, centering around the development of a community land trust on the London Olympic Park site.

### Can you tell us about your work in London?

My work with Troy Gardens put me in conversations with people around the world, including Dave Smith at the East London Community Land Trust (CLT). He was inspired by that project, and was interested in learning how to apply some of the lessons we learned to his work in East London because Troy Gardens was based on a long-term community organizing effort. Every year, he brings over a speaker for his annual meeting, who also meets with various government officials to promote the community land trust model. They brought me over this past August to give a speech about developing a community land trust at the Olympic Park, and also to meet with lots of folks, including members of the London city council and the head of real estate development for the Olympic site.

The East London CLT was established by London Citizens, who do really effective community organizing work all around London, and in other parts of the U.K. It was great to see the connection between organizing and housing, because I believe that a big part of the “community” in community land trusts is community organizing.

### What are some of the challenges you have faced?

It was difficult to sort out ideas for a community land trust at the Olympic Park without ever having visited the site, and without having a clear sense of the surrounding neighborhood. I read everything I could about it, and also did research on the impact past Olympics have had on the neighborhoods in which they are located. The Summer Olympics are often located in low-income neighborhoods, which results in the displacement of a lot of folks and the hyperinflation of housing prices. The Olympics were great for London, but they were rough for East London.

### What has been the best part of your experience working on this project?

I was pretty nervous going into this trip, because they were talking me up as a very impressive expert from America, and I wanted to do my best to live up to the reputation. Once I got there, I got engaged in the work, and had great meetings with some really interesting people. My speech went well, but at the time I thought I bombed because the audience was so quiet—it turns out that is just the nature of English audiences, and they were appreciative of my comments.

Of course, it was great to spend a week in London. It is truly one of the world’s great cities, though the hyperinflation of housing prices is really having a devastating effect on many thousands of residents.

### Do you see any differences between U.S. and London in how they organize communities?

London Citizens uses an Alinsky-based organizing model, so they were very much inspired by the U.S. community organizing movement. They are all about organizing to build power—and then presenting workable solutions to pressing issues. It is one area where there seems to be a lot of commonality.

### What are the future goals for this project?

Since I’ve been back, I’ve been organizing international support for a community land trust at the Olympic Park. We’re putting together letters from people around the world that will be bundled together and presented to London Mayor Boris Johnson in December. We’re going to keep pushing at it until there is a firm commitment for a community land trust at the Olympic Park, in particular one that will be done the “right way”, so it can be an inspiration to other communities around the world. 🇬🇧

