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REFORMING THE JUVENILE CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION: EFFORTS OF THE U.S. CHILDREN’S BUREAU IN THE 1930s*

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The U.S. Children’s Bureau, the federal agency responsible for social policy for children in the early part of this century, delayed studying the problems associated with the institutionalization of juvenile delinquents for nearly twenty-five years. In the 1930’s, the Bureau undertook several projects and studies related to training schools for delinquents which were designed to create reform in an area long recognized as harmful to children. This article traces the history of the Bureau’s work in the institutional field from 1912–54, analyzes the reasons for the agency’s initial reluctance and later activity in this area, discusses the results of these early reform efforts and suggests reasons for the Bureau’s failure to achieve significant reform in the juvenile correctional field.

INTRODUCTION

The juvenile correctional institution, virtually since its invention in the early nineteenth century, has proved to be a disappointment to those who have sought effective means of controlling and reforming juvenile misconduct and a resilient obstacle to those who have wanted to reform or do away with it. From the placing-out movement of the mid-nineteenth century to the proliferation of probation systems and the advent of the juvenile court at the end of that century, to the deinstitu-

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tionalization movement of our own times, alternatives to the harsh and seemingly ineffective practices of the institution have been sought, and yet the institution has continued, sometimes mildly altered but generally intact. (For good discussions of the history of juvenile institutions, see Brenzel, 1981; Holl, 1971; Mennel, 1973; Pickett, 1969; Platt, 1969; Rothman, 1971 and 1980 and Schlossman, 1977. For critiques of modern juvenile institutional reform efforts see, for instance, Bullington et al., 1983 and Krisberg et al., 1986).

Beginning with the establishment of the Children’s Bureau in 1912, there has been an increasing federal role in the delinquency field (Krisberg et al., 1986: 5). However, very little has been written about federal delinquency policy prior to the 1970’s. The purpose of this article is to discuss the role of the U.S. Children’s Bureau in the juvenile institutional field in the first half of this century. The focus is on an analysis of the Bureau’s late attention to reform efforts in the juvenile correctional field, an assessment of the reasons for the delay as well as the reasons for finally entering this field, a summary of the Bureau’s policy and programmatic recommendations in the field and an evaluation of the lack of success which the Bureau experienced in its endeavors.

The Bureau, the only federal child welfare agency until the passage of the Social Security Act in 1935, remained for many years an enormously influential beacon of humane and progressive child welfare policy standards to governmental and private agencies. Although its authority was virtually unchallenged in the time period I discuss, the Bureau showed great initial reluctance to challenge correctional institutions directly. By the 1930’s, the Bureau was engaged in a number of institutions-related projects, and it published a major study of training schools in the 1930’s which was designed to influence and change the more repressive aspects of institutional life. Despite some support from more liberal leaders in the institutional field, the Bureau’s influence in this field appears to have been minimal. The history of the Bureau’s activities in this area reveals the difficulties of federal policy-making in an area seen as politicallytreacherous; moreover, it contributes to our un-
derstanding of the seemingly intractable practice of institutionalizing the young.

THE U.S. CHILDREN'S BUREAU: EARLY HISTORY

The U.S. Children's Bureau was formed as the first federal child welfare agency in 1912, following the recommendation for such an agency at the 1909 White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children. Best known for its work in the fields of maternal and child health and child labor reform—areas in which it had intermittent administrative duties—the Bureau also carried on significant research and reform activities in what it called the Social Services where it focussed on the causes and service needs of dependent, neglected, defective and delinquent children. Until 1935 when the Bureau assumed administrative funding and oversight responsibility for the child welfare portion of the Social Security Act, the work of the Bureau in the social services was carried out through research, publication, conference participations, advisory work to state governments and advocacy organizations and informal ties to private reform organizations. In the area of delinquency policy as well as other areas of child welfare, the Bureau was regarded as the premier authority by other researchers and practitioners during the early part of this century (Rosenthal, 1986; Costin, 1983).

In its development of delinquency as well as other child welfare policy, the Bureau, which was staffed by a small group of well-educated and reform-minded women, relied upon a combination of internal expertise and formal and informal consultation from outside experts. The Bureau's first chief was Julia Lathrop who had been an important early resident of Hull House in Chicago and who had been intimately involved in the establishment of the first juvenile court in Cook County (Adams, 1935). During her tenure, 1913–1921, the Bureau concentrated largely on the juvenile court in its discussions about delinquency. During this same time, the Bureau developed internal leadership in the delinquency field by putting Katharine Lenroot, the daughter of a U.S. Senator from Wisconsin and twenty-four years old when she came to work for the Bureau in
1915, in charge of many of the studies in this policy area. Lenroot became the third Chief of the Bureau in 1934. Between Lathrop and Lenroot, Grace Abbott, the powerful and often critical intellectual and able administrator who also came to the Bureau via Hull House, served as Chief. These three women, and Emma Lundberg who headed the Social Services Division of the Bureau in its early years (see below), were responsible for developing the Bureau’s policy in the delinquency area. Lathrop and Abbott had strong Chicago ties which sustained them throughout their professional careers; Lenroot and Lundberg, who maintained a lifelong friendship, had both attended the University of Wisconsin. All were tireless workers who presented an official voice for progressive reform in all areas of child welfare where betterment of social conditions and administrative arrangements for children in need would be provided through a gradual growth of governmental intervention (Rosenthal, 1983).

In addition to their own experiences and observations, the women of the Children’s Bureau relied upon a small group of outside experts in their development of delinquency policy: William Healy, the psychiatrist associated early with the Psychopathic Clinic of the Cook County court and later the Judge Baker Clinic in Boston and his psychologist wife, Augusta Bronner who together conducted several early studies of delinquents and did much to promote the notion of psychological disturbance in delinquent youth (Lubove, 1965: 64–66); Miriam Van Waters, a psychologist, who served during the early years of the Bureau’s existence as a referee in the Los Angeles juvenile court, had developed a progressive group residence for girls and became an influential writer and critic in the delinquency field; Roger Baldwin and later Charles Chute of the National Probation Association; and several progressive juvenile court judges. This small network of experts served as reflective sounding boards for the Bureau, wrote monographs published by the Bureau, and served on committees and presented at conferences along with Bureau personnel.

The Bureau, especially during the Abbott years, also relied heavily on Abbott’s connections with the School of Social Ser-
vice Administration at the University of Chicago where her sister, Edith, was Dean. Chicago students occasionally conducted and wrote studies for the Bureau and often came to work for the Bureau after finishing their social work training (Costin, 83: 162).

The mood of child welfare reformers during the progressive era was clearly anti-institutional. The 1909 White House Conference itself had declared, in a now-famous statement, that the institution was not a preferred place in which to raise children:

Home life is the highest product of civilization. It is the great molding force of mind and character. Children should not be deprived of it except for urgent and compelling reasons. (Bremener et al., 1971, vol. 2:365)

While this statement was aimed largely at the practice of placing dependent children in orphanages—or worse, almshouses—, the sentiment held true for other areas of child welfare as well. In the delinquency field, the development and spread of the juvenile court (the first had been formed in Chicago and Denver in 1899) was seen by many reformers as a powerful anti-institutional reform itself. Probation, the treatment arm of the court and the feature most touted by reformers, would prevent unnecessary institutional commitments while it would provide needed guidance and supervision to deviant youths and their families (Mennel, 1973: 124–131; Schultz, 1978).

Given this anti-institutional bias, one might have expected the Bureau to confront directly the problem of inadequate and even brutal treatment of children in correctional institutions early on. This did not happen; instead, the Bureau concentrated on investigating the conditions surrounding the development of delinquency and in promoting new treatment alternatives for delinquent youth.

Of primary concern in its early work in the delinquency field was an examination of practices of the new juvenile courts (Belden, 1920). Disappointed by the findings of that study, the Bureau then published several monographs promoting the
methods and utility of probation and psychological examination (Claghorn, 1918; Chute, 1921; Healy, 1922). The Bureau also sponsored a project to develop appropriate standards for the court. These standards, developed by a committee composed of acknowledged experts in the field, emphasized the importance of probation and stated, in an introductory remark, that institutionalization was to be used as a last resort only (U.S. Children's Bureau, 1923a). Later, increasingly discouraged by the court's performance, the Bureau looked to and promoted the use of alternative treatment programs (Thom, 1924; U.S. Children’s Bureau, 1926 and 1932b). In all, the Bureau published at least thirty studies concerning delinquency and its treatment between 1918 and 1935.

EARLY INSTITUTIONAL WORK: AVOIDANCE OF INTERVENTION

Despite the anti-institutional attitude shared by many child welfare reformers at the time of the Bureau's formation and early work, the Bureau did very little to confront directly many of the institutional practices known to be both common and harmful. The Bureau's style of urging reform was to emphasize the positive example rather than to criticize; thus the Bureau praised probation but failed to discuss juvenile correctional institutions directly until 1935—twenty-three years into its work.

Bureau leaders avoided direct confrontations with institutional officials or state bureaucrats who would feel particularly threatened by such criticism. In an early and revealing correspondence, for instance, Julia Lathrop—the first Bureau Chief who had been known as a stern critic of institutional care when she served on the Illinois State Board of Charities—refused to involve herself in a complaint about an Arkansas training school which was accused of exploiting children's labor and endangering their health. She stated that the Bureau had no authority over state institutions and would, in fact, be resented if it tried to interfere. Instead, she urged the complainant to organize the women’s clubs, chambers of commerce and other organizations to demand local change (U.S. Children’s Bureau, 1921).
While the reasons for this avoidance are not completely clear, the fact that the Bureau was concentrating most of its reformist energies in the maternal and child health and child labor fields, both of which continually engendered much controversy, was undoubtedly a factor. The Maternal and Infancy Protection Act (Sheppard-Towner) was passed in November, 1921. This legislation had been sought by the Bureau and its allies, and it thrust upon the Bureau considerable new responsibilities which included development of cooperative administrative relations with state governments (Costin, 1983: 134). The battle to end child labor was even more controversial (Costin, 1983). Undoubtedly Lathrop, and later Abbott, did not want to jeopardize these programs by attacking the states’ operations in another arena.

The Bureau did, however, begin to build an understanding of conditions in institutions. First-hand impressions of local institutions were gained by Emma Lundberg and Katharine Lenroot when they made field visits in the early 1920’s to juvenile courts in preparation of their study, *Juvenile Courts at Work* (Lenroot and Lundberg, 1925). For instance, they wrote notes describing the City School for Boys, a segregated institution for eighty black and sixty white boys located outside of New Orleans: white boys had school up to the eighth grade, “coloreds” only to the fifth; the white side of the institution had beds (although they were dirty) while the “colored” side had hammocks strapped onto iron frames with no bed linen; the “colored” dining room was particularly repelling:

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bare table, benches with no backs; bread placed on table without plates. Bread was being placed on table for supper, black with flies. Kitchen full of flies. (U.S. Children’s Bureau, 1920)
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Aside from recording these observations, however, these Bureau personnel appear to have done little to intervene in this situation.

Through the twenties, the Bureau received sporadic complaints about bad conditions in training schools and mistreatment of inmates. A 1929 letter from a former inmate of the Lancaster School in Ohio, for instance, complained of whip-
pings and fatal beatings. A news article, also from 1929, dis-
cussing an investigation of the giving of drugs called "twilight
sleep" to girls in an Albuquerque girls' welfare home was sent
to Grace Abbott, then Chief of the Bureau, for her attention.
The response to these issues remained private, at most prompt-
ing Bureau personnel to refer the complaints to local officials
(U.S. Children's Bureau, 1929b). Apparently the position taken
by Lathrop earlier, designed to maintain the good will of state
officials, was shared by Abbott.

The reluctance of the Bureau to confront the known prob-
lems of treatment of juveniles in institutions directly is demon-
strated by an internal disagreement between Lundberg and
Abbott. Lundberg had written a report, published in 1924,
about an institution for dependent children in Wisconsin, and
she felt that the Bureau's editors had done a "white-washing"
of it in order to avoid controversy:

\[\ldots (a)\text{ field study would have little value unless the description}
could be "critical"—conditions are pretty bad in most of these
institutions, and unless a report could be made with the purpose
of showing the bad features that have developed, there seemed
to me to be little value in such a study. (U.S. Children's Bureau,}
1924)\]

The dispute was not resolved in Lundberg's favor; the pub-
lished report contained no description at all of the conditions in
the institution (U.S. Children's Bureau, 1925), and Lundberg
soon left the Bureau.

The Bureau had several other occasions during the 1920's
to consider institutional care. In 1927, it published a Handbook
for the Use of Boards of Directors, Superintendents and Staffs of
Institutions for Dependent Children (U.S. Children's Bureau,
1927), prepared in consultation with an advisory board of per-
sons well-known in the institutional field, both public and pri-
vate. Although the Bureau did not want to encourage the con-
tinued use of institutions for dependent children and said so in
this publication, it recognized that such institutions continued
to exist in many places. Since they were no longer needed for
their original purposes, institutions could undertake "the care
of new types of cases, frequently accepting children, who though not seriously delinquent, require because of home conditions a period of care and retraining under wholesome surroundings." (Ibid.: 5) The private, residential treatment center was being created out of the old orphanage, and its proper role was to resocialize the pre-delinquent, behavior-disordered child by substituting for the bad influences experienced by him earlier.

If this publication did not discourage the use of the institution, neither did other Bureau activities in the remainder the decade. In general, however, the Bureau’s approach was to concentrate on new and innovative methods of treating delinquency while remaining silent on the subject of the old and outmoded. As the focus shifted to early intervention and prevention, as it did by the mid-1920’s with the growth of the child guidance movement and other clinical programs, older programs were acknowledged as necessary holdovers until adequate numbers of early intervention programs could be established. “Foundations of juvenile delinquency are usually laid in very early childhood,” Katharine Lenroot told the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement (the “Wickersham Commission”) in 1929, and thus “early diagnosis and treatment of problems of personality and behavior” were the only approaches which could hope to eradicate the problem. Institutions did not enter the picture until the delinquent was already an adolescent (U.S. Children’s Bureau, 1929c: 169–72). Thus, although reform of the institution was acknowledged as a need, it was not the focal point of the Bureau’s interest.

This attitude was evident again in the 1930 White House Conference on Child Health and Protection’s book-length report on delinquency. Lenroot served as Secretary of the Delinquency Committee of the Conference on Child Health and Protection, and she exerted a prevailing influence in the recommendations which were issued. In its section on correctional institutions, the report attempted to balance mild criticism with description and attention to beneficial programs. The report’s summary statement about institutions was not only optimistic about the benefits of institutions but also rec-
ommended a future role for them to play in the treatment of delinquency:

The institution provides an environment of outstanding value to certain types of children who have always been with us and who always will be. In the future institutions will be adapted to children who belong there, not used as a place for the reception of children merely because they apparently do not belong in society. (The White House Conference on Child Health and Protection, 1930: 232–3)

INSTITUTIONAL STUDIES: THE REALITY

Despite their general reluctance to discuss publicly the realities on institutional practices and to face a confrontation with state officials which might come as a result of such an exposure, the Bureau nevertheless did become involved in several studies of training institutions for juveniles during the 1930's. Its work culminated in a two-part publication Institutional Treatment of Delinquent Boys (Bowler and Bloodgood, 1935, 1936), which examined the operations of five institutions and provided a follow-up study of the outcomes of several hundred boys who had been institutionalized.

CRITIQUES BY EXPERTS

One reason for the Bureau's belated attention to institutional issues was an increased interest in the subject among professionals in the field. In 1925, Miriam Van Waters, by then well-known, published an influential study, Youth In Conflict, which discussed both the causes and treatment of delinquency. She had made the following, searing remarks about discipline in facilities for delinquents:

Handcuffs, tying up, straight-jackets, immersing in cold water, and various other forms of torture described under the name water-cure, whipping, dosing with drugs to produce nausea, solitary confinement in dark cells, semi-starvation for weeks on a diet of bread and water, or bread and milk, are punishments still inflicted in some state schools. . . . (Van Waters, 1925: 213)
These kinds of "injury" were condemned not merely because they inflicted pain, but also because they "wrecked the spirit of children." Van Waters had added:

If someone remarks that parents use the rod, and other corrective displays of force, let it be clearly understood that chastisement by a wise, loved parent is psychologically different from use of corporal punishment by a state official. The social effect of repressive, violent methods of discipline in state correctional schools is wholly bad, and should be universally condemned by social workers and the community as costly, inefficient, stupid and dangerous. (Ibid: 215)

In 1931, Van Waters, who was then a consultant to the Harvard Law School Crime Survey, published The Child Offender in the Federal System of Justice under the joint auspices of the White House Conference and the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement (National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, 1931). In this study, she examined what happened to juveniles charged and/or convicted of federal offenses—a problem which was also of concern to the Bureau (see below). She again minced no words when discussing the deficient and even cruel practices which characterized many of the institutions, several of them juvenile training schools operated by the federal government and the states (under contract with the federal authorities), to which juvenile offenders were sent:

The best of the institutions houses the children in large groups, uses basements for living and play rooms, employs disciplinary measures, such as silence at meals, marching, formal routine, and flogging; inmates are frequently at the mercy of boy captains; the worst is not to be distinguished from the prison. . . . Individualization of treatment has not been accomplished. In some instances the child offender is properly clothed, fed, put to school and work, but the needs of the spirit for creative outlets, personal guidance, and satisfying human relationships are unfulfilled. (Ibid.: 106)

Other influential critiques of institutionalization had been written around in the same time. In 1926, William Healy and Au-
gusta Bronner published *Delinquents and Criminals: Their Making and Unmaking*. They noted that in a follow-up of criminal cases in Chicago, 85% had had institutional commitments as juveniles. Because these juveniles had returned to their same living environments and continued to associate with other delinquents, it made little difference to their future whether or not they were institutionalized or to which institution they went (Healy and Bronner, 1926: 78). In 1930, Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck came to similar conclusions in a study of young male offenders in Massachusetts: about 80% of parolees had committed offenses within five years of their release from the reformatory (Glueck and Glueck, 1930). Both of these studies had concerned themselves with boys of an older age than those usually sent to juvenile training schools, and when the Bureau undertook its study in 1930, there was none that specifically looked at the performance of those facilities or at follow-up of parolees from them (Bowler and Bloodgood, 1935: 5).

**BUREAU’S WORK IN THE FEDERAL FIELD**

Perhaps an even more compelling incentive for the Bureau to publish in this area was its own experience studying the plight of juveniles caught in the federal system. As early as 1922, the Bureau had reported and lobbied for the provisions of juvenile court procedures to be available to those youths. Though a Federal Probation Act had been passed in 1925, the Bureau and other advocates were not satisfied with the treatment juveniles continued to get and felt that these juveniles should be, as a matter of law, referred to their state juvenile courts. Enabling legislation for such referrals was passed in 1932, and in 1938, the “Federal Delinquency Law” provided that those not so referred would be charged under federal law not with a specific crime but with the general charge of juvenile delinquency and would be handled in detention and correctional facilities designed specifically for juveniles.

Before these statutory reforms were enacted, the Bureau had been approached by the Justice Department in 1931 to work cooperatively to develop information about local resources, including detention and correctional facilities, for
youths charged with federal offenses so that local federal authorities would have better access to suitable programs for juveniles within their areas. This invitation resulted in a three-year project which involved the visiting of nearly sixty institutions, mostly in the South and Southwest (where most of the federal cases arose).

Most of the institutional visits occurred between the fall of 1931 and the winter of 1934. Although specific reports are not locatable in extant records, the impression is clear that conditions in the institutions visited were often so poor that the child in the federal system had to travel many miles in order to be housed in an institution approved by the Bureau. The situation was particularly difficult for black juveniles, since southern institutions for blacks had appallingly bad conditions while many better institutions, even those in the North, refused to admit blacks. The situation for black girls was desperate; the Bureau knew of only one acceptable institution in the South while many states made no provision for this population at all. These girls were sometimes referred to institutions which had not been evaluated (U.S. Children’s Bureau, 1937a).

The problem was discussed by Sanford Bates of the Bureau of Prisons who had initiated the visitation project. In an early issue of the Bureau’s monthly publication, The Child, he noted that some children involved in the federal system continued, in 1937, to require admission in institutions far from home because “local facilities are meager and . . . the State school to which the child would be sent is not properly equipped to handle the difficult matter of reforming the juvenile delinquent.” Too many institutions were either over-crowded or “not proper” places to which to send children (Bates, 1937).

**THE BUREAU UNDERTAKES INSTITUTIONAL STUDY**

Until 1935 when its major study, *Institutional Treatment of Delinquent Boys* (Bowler and Bloodgood, 1935) was published, the Bureau had no material to send to seekers of information about good institutional models. When these requests were made, the Bureau encouraged the writer to correspond directly with institutions thought to be good. As requests for models of
good treatment increased and as stories of cruelty in institutions mounted, the Bureau apparently felt the need to do its own research. Early in 1929, Bureau Chief Grace Abbott began to plan a study of about six of the "best" institutions to be complemented with a study of the adjustment of boys who had been released from these facilities for at least five years (U.S. Children's Bureau, 1929a).

The plan to conduct an institutional study was prompted, then, by the availability of a new constituency of professionals who were working in the institutional field. Years before, the Bureau had developed a policy to carry out studies only when there seemed to be an interested audience to implement the recommendations which flowed therefrom (U.S. Children's Bureau, 1923b); the growing number of requests for information in this area apparently fit this requirement.

Abbott's approach was to reform institutional practices through instruction rather than attack. This approach corresponded with the process of conducting studies to meet the needs of interested constituents. In a communication about the institutional study, she offered the opinion that the Van Waters' study had "produced no result except resentment. It ought to be possible eventually to be pretty frank in criticism but the position for that will have to be built up gradually" (U.S. Children's Bureau, 1932a).

By the time the Bureau's study was published, however, the desire to instruct through positive example had been somewhat diminished by reality: the six "best" institutions were reduced to five "representative" ones, chosen because of their geographical dispersion; their urban, rural and suburban settings; their use of older and newer forms of treatment; and their having placed on parole a sufficient number of boys to provide a useful study cohort for the examination of post-institutional adjustment. No longer exemplary, these five institutions—the Whittier State School (California), the Boys' Vocational School (Lansing, Michigan), the State Home for Boys (New Jersey), the State Agricultural and Industrial School (Industry, New York) and the Boys' Industrial School (Lancaster, Ohio)—were described as exhibiting both "the values and the
difficulties” inherent in all training schools (Bowler and Bloodgood, 1935: Letter of Transmittal).

The report was written by Alida C. Bowler, then Director of the Bureau’s Delinquency Division, and Ruth S. Bloodgood, a long-time Bureau employee. Interviews for the follow-up study of community adjustment (Bowler and Bloodgood, 1936), were done by “men agents” hired for this purpose. Harrison A. Dobbs, a professor of social economy at the University of Chicago’s School of Social Service Administration, who had formerly been Director of the Cook County Detention Home, served as a consultant to the study.

Part 1 — Treatment Programs of Five State Institutions of the publication, over three hundred pages long, provided a careful and detailed description of every aspect of each institution’s program. The descriptions were for the most part sympathetic and discussed deficiencies as problems of knowledge or finance rather than ones of malfeasance or mistreatment. Descriptions were not, however, neutral; criticism, polite but clear, was often apparent, especially in regard to the Lancaster, Ohio institution. This facility was of particular interest since it had been the first in this country to be established on the “cottage” system of housing and organized daily activities in keeping with the notion of “family-group life.” The report noted that these “cottages” were housing anywhere from fifty to ninety boys, in contrast to the New York State Agricultural and Industrial School which more appropriately housed a maximum of twenty-five boys. The report painted the New York facility as being ideally community-like:

The colonies really seemed somewhat like individual farm homes clustered about a community center which contained the school, work shops and chapels. . . . Each colony had a supervisor and a matron who were husband and wife. . . . The colony supervisor and matron assumed a relationship that was very like that of a foster father and mother. As the colony groups were small . . . the colony father and mother could really know each boy intimately and deal with him on an individual basis. (Bowler and Bloodgood, 1935: 148)
Lancaster, on the other hand, was found to have numerous problems in addition to over-crowding. Administrators with little education, overworked line staff, no formalized administrative structure and little coordination of activities characterized the facility. More seriously, and perhaps consequently, the report noted:

At this school there were many more evidences of regimentation and repression than at the four other institutions included in the study. One of the most striking evidences was the constant passing of long, silent, shuffling lines of boys marching two by two about the grounds. There was also something about the expression of the faces of the boys—sullenness and sometimes fear or hate—that contributed to the impression. Little or no spontaneous conversation and laughter were observed at any time about the grounds. There was a rough-and-ready character to the interchange between officers and boys and a brusqueness in the directions given the suggested military usage rather than ordinary teacher-pupil relations. (Ibid.: 190)

This description was the harshest specific criticism to be found in the study and, by opposites, it indicates what the investigators would have preferred to have found: a congenial, spontaneous and wholesome group of youths being supportively, though firmly, guided by caring and sympathetic adults.

In a seventy-five page chapter, “Recapitulation and Comments,” the authors allowed themselves to remark comparatively on the five institutions studied in detail, drawing also on observations from the thirty-seven institutions visited in the federal delinquency project, and to suggest a series of preferred practices for institutions to follow (Ibid: 212-288). These recommendations constituted an undeclared set of standards for institutional conduct. They emphasized the importance of keeping the size of institutions “relatively small,” that is, not over five hundred residents; the preference for cottage residential systems; the benefits of civil service for the hiring of staff; and a prohibition against corporal punishment. The report stressed the necessity to develop flexible and varied educational programs which would compensate for prior educational deficits and would expose residents to realistic vocational
opportunities, rather than being organized around the maintenance functions of the institution. But while the report emphasized the vocational goals of teaching modern, skilled techniques, it did not question the role that the institution played in maintaining social and economic class arrangements. These were poor boys bound to join the ranks of poor adults. The most that could be hoped for was that the boys would be exposed to some kind of job which would interest, if not inspire, them enough to become dutiful members of the society at large. Of course, the study was being published in the midst of the Depression, and the best to be hoped for was that these youth would be able to find any sort of steady employment.

The most important set of recommendations—ones that were consistent with a design to increase the presence of social workers in the staffing and administrative control of the institutions—were focussed around the need to individualize the treatment of inmates. "Mass treatment," whether by custodians or by lone psychologists performing routine testing, was decried. Instead, the report recommended that institutions hire more trained psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers so that each youth could receive treatment designed to fit his needs. This recommendation held especially true for the area of aftercare, an area which was uniformly understaffed and ignored but vitally important for the future adjustment of the residents. A boy came to institutions because of failure in his home or community:

It is most unreasonable and absurd to expect this young and inexperienced boy, even after good response to training in the protected life in the institution, to return to an uncorrected home or community . . . and to succeed in resisting the destructive influences there. (Ibid: 284)

An effective parole service, staffed by social workers, would not merely track youths after their discharge from the institution, but more importantly, would evaluate the home setting, remedy it where necessary and fashion alternative living arrangements for boys whose homes were unsalvageable.

The concern with the need for social work professionals in
institutional settings, particularly in regard to the discharge process, emerged again in the second part of the report, *Institutional Treatment of Delinquent Boys—A Study of 751 Boys* (Bowler and Bloodgood, 1936). This study specifically evaluated the behavior of youths who had been institutionalized at the five facilities and then discharged from parole at least five years before the study began. Like the previous studies of post-institutional adjustment referred to above, the Bureau's findings were that institutionalization did not lead to positive adult careers. Overall, only 32% of the subjects had made a successful adjustment (that is, they were "fairly certain to be useful citizens"); 33% had "doubtful" adjustments; and 35% had unsuccessful adjustments (they were "failures beyond any doubt," committing additional offenses or earning a livelihood through illicit means) (Ibid: 98).

After examining a host of possibilities of factors associated with the three outcomes, the writers found that two seemed most important: employment adjustment and the home and community conditions from which the boy had come and to which he returned. These findings provided the basis for a re-emphasis of the need for an "overhaul" of institutional programs in two areas: academic and vocational training on the one hand and placement and supervision after release on the other (Ibid: 120-1).

**INSTITUTIONAL REFORM: PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS**

The emphasis which the Bureau study placed on an expanded social work role in the administrative and treatment aspects of institutional care reflected a shift which was occurring in the ranks of the organized institutional administrators. A new self-consciousness among training school directors appears to have taken place, as reflected by an increased number of articles in professional journals (Winsor, 1935; McHugh, 1935; Derrick, 1936; Dobbs, 1936, for instance). At the same time, a rift took place among the directors of training schools who had met, under the title of the National Association of Training Schools, at the annual meetings of the American Pris-
on Association until 1936 when a sizeable faction of the group voted to meet as part of the National Conference of Social Work instead.

Within a short period of time, the new, social welfare-oriented group sought help from the Bureau in formulating standards for training schools, and they sought Lenroot's leadership to serve as the head of this project. Lenroot agreed to the title of Chairman of the new Advisory Committee on Training Schools for Delinquent Children, and she provided a staff person, Helen Haseltine, who served as coordinator and researcher for the Committee. The Committee itself had a dual function: advising the Bureau on needed research and recommendations and sharing the Bureau's findings with training school personnel (U.S. Children's Bureau, 1938).

No formal report was ever issued by this Committee, although a Subcommittee on Philosophy and Goals did publish a long, two-part statement in the Bureau's widely circulated periodical, The Child (U.S. Children's Bureau, 1938a). This statement underlined the importance of keeping out of institutions all but those who, after individual evaluation, were deemed appropriate; emphasized clinical components of training schools (now consistently referred to as facilities for "socially maladjusted children"); and called for the administrative supervision of training schools to be done by the child welfare rather than the correctional branch of government. This point was considered very important; indeed, it was probably considered the crux of a progressive approach to institutional care, because it created:

a spirit free from repression and . . . opportunities for social growth, promised higher standards of care, and assured more appropriate and flexible after-care supervision including long-term care when necessary. (Ibid.: 201)

These recommendations, made in the name of trusted institutional personnel, provided the Bureau with the opportunity to disseminate broadly their views of new and humane approaches toward institutional care which it hoped would become generally accepted. While the formal study of the training
schools was distributed to institutional personnel, libraries and those requesting the report, *The Child* had a wide circulation among child welfare practitioners and bureaucrats, and thus the reformist, child welfare-oriented approach of the Bureau undoubtedly reached many people working in the field.

What happened to the Advisory Committee after the publication of its preliminary statement is not clear. Studies of cottage life, of institutions in Alabama and of institutional treatment of delinquent girls were proposed and discussed internally and at Advisory Committee meetings (U.S. Children’s Bureau, 1937b and 1940a), but these studies never received separate publication, nor were they published in *The Child*. Apparently the Bureau also tried to make peace between the rival training school factions, after the National Association of Training Schools commissioned a study of training schools which emphasized the importance of social work services in the institution (Cox and Bixby, 1938).

A change in Bureau personnel working on delinquency issues, preoccupation with the greater responsibilities of administering the rural Child Welfare Services program (Title V of the Social Security Act), internal and external disagreements as well as general national interest in problems related to the War all succeeded in curtailing the Bureau’s activities in the institutional field specifically and in delinquency matters more generally. In 1940, the Bureau did publish a training school directory which was limited to a very brief description of the location and population of each institution (U.S. Children’s Bureau, 1940).

In 1947, Emma Lundberg, who had returned to work for the Bureau in the mid-1930’s, repeated again the criteria for institutions recommended by the Advisory Committee on Training Schools for Delinquent Children in a chapter of a then-important book on child welfare. She noted:

> The standards which have been cited are those toward which the best training schools in the country have been moving. In practice, only a small percentage of the institutions for juvenile delinquents throughout the country measure up to these requirements as yet. The objectives quoted describe goals, not present achievements. (Lundberg, 1947: 347–8)
Clearly, the studies and the statements published in the 1930’s had done little to alter actual institutional practices.

It was not until 1954, after renewed national interest in the problem of delinquency, that the Bureau published *Tentative Standards for Training Schools* (U.S. Children’s Bureau, 1954). The Forward to this document stated that the Standards were formulated as a result of requests from the National Conference of Juvenile Agencies and the National Association of Training Schools, the two rival groups which had finally merged in the spring of 1954. The introduction went on to note that no standards in this field could be considered “final,” and that these had received commentary from institutional representatives who had met to comment upon them prior to publication (U.S. Children’s Bureau, 1954: 1). Thus, before proceeding with pronouncing standards, the Bureau felt it needed the approval of personnel in the institutional field, and the pronouncements themselves were hesitantly made. The standards themselves did not differ greatly from the recommendations made by the Bureau in its 1935 institutional study, despite the claim of “fluidity” in the field.

CONCLUSIONS

Reform of juvenile institutions was a problem which the U.S. Children’s Bureau approached slowly and hesitantly. Dedicated to a didactic method of encouraging reform through research and standard-setting, it took the Bureau twenty-three years to publish a major study of training schools for delinquents and nearly another twenty to publish standards for them. The Bureau’s reluctance in this area may be explained by a combination of factors: a desire to avoid confrontations with state officials responsible for running institutions, sporadic interest within the professional communities which formed the Bureau’s constituency and from which it could expect a response, and a prior hope that its efforts to support non-institutional treatment alternatives would obviate the need to attack the issue head-on.

Part of the Bureau’s difficulties in effectuating change was clearly related to the limitations of its methods. Having no
money to dispense during the majority of the time period discussed here, the Bureau could neither coerce change by withholding grants to state authorities responsible for administering juvenile programs nor induce change by offering grants to experiment with more humane institutional practices. When the Bureau did develop monetary control over the dispensing of child welfare monies made available under Title V of the Social Security Act, it sponsored several projects aimed at bettering institutional programs. By 1940, twenty-five distinct projects concerned with training schools and other delinquency matters were being funded in fifteen states (U.S. Children’s Bureau, 1940c). Many of these projects were aimed at studying and reforming the intake and discharge practices of training schools so as to prevent inappropriate commitments and to facilitate returns to home or substitute care. It is not known how successful these projects were, but in any event they were tiny programs, usually employing one or two workers, whose impact could not be expected to be great.

If the Bureau was late to wrestle with the problem of institutional practices and their effects on juveniles, its lengthy studies and work with more liberal institutional directors in the 1930’s demonstrated an ultimate willingness to confront the reality of the institutions’ staying power. Both the studies and the standards announced the Children’s Bureau commitment to humane and instructive treatment of youths whose placement in institutions it now saw as inevitable. In its endorsement of hegemony for social work in the training school field, the Bureau not only sought to move the institutions to treat their wards more gently, but it also sought to reinforce its more firm conviction that it was the home that needed rehabilitation more than the juvenile. In this way, the Bureau perhaps sought to feminize institutional practices, long under the leadership of conservative men. By the end of the period discussed here, the Bureau had begun to refer to delinquents as “socially maladjusted children” and training schools as potential “treatment facilities” for them. While the Bureau’s recommendations for a social work administrative pre-eminence were generally ig-
nored and its new terminology was not quickly adopted, they presaged the important role which child welfare would ultimately play in the placement and treatment of delinquent children (Lerman, 1984).

Institutional care of children—a key issue at the first White House Conference with which the Bureau was strongly identified—remained a problematic area for the Bureau to remedy. Resistive to outside intrusion and firmly entrenched despite alternative forms of intervention for juveniles, the training schools thwarted the Bureau's rather belated and tentative attempts to alter their practices.

In our own time, the federal effort to challenge the entrenched system of juvenile institutions has also met with disappointment. Aided by generous funding authorized by the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, the federal government was for ten years associated with efforts to remove status offenders from correctional institutions and, in general, to minimize the harshness of the juvenile justice system. While their specific findings may differ somewhat, the overall consensus of the evaluators of the modern institutional reform movement is that it has not worked: total commitments to public correctional institutions have declined, but lengths of stay in these institutions have increased and substitute residential systems, under the auspices of public child welfare, mental health and drug and alcohol treatment agencies (many of which support private treatment facilities) have mushroomed, more than making up for the decline in admissions to the correctional facilities. Further, while there has been success in removing status offenders, and especially females, from correctional facilities, there has been no such change for delinquents who continue to be confined in large numbers to these institutions (Bullington, et al., 1983; Handler and Zatz, 1982; Lerman, 1980, 1982 and 1984; Krisberg and Schwartz, 1983; and Krisberg, et. al, 1986).

The experience of the Children's Bureau in the institutional field in the 1930's demonstrates an early effort by a federal agency to reform practices seen as deleterious to juvenile delin-
quents. If these efforts were unsuccessful, at least they acknowledged the reality of the institutions' important role in the delinquency intervention system.

REFERENCES


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