

**the missouri home  
for negro girls  
the 1930s**

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and

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Late nineteenth-century industrialization brought social changes that shocked and frightened many Americans. Populism, a farmers' protest movement that reached the height of its force in the 1890s, tried unsuccessfully to forestall the nation's movement away from an agrarian lifestyle. When that effort failed, another group of reformers, the Progressives, emerged on the scene. They accepted the inevitability of industrialization, but sought to control its excesses and alleviate, or remove altogether, the suffering it brought in its wake. The one group of people these turn-of-the-century Americans hoped to save above all others was the children. Progressives saw urban children as being at once the most victimized by industrialization, but also the most salvageable.<sup>1</sup>

The Progressives possessed a self-confidence that bordered on arrogance: *they* knew what these vulnerable children of the cities needed better than anyone else, better even than the youngsters' parents. Moreover, as historian David Rothman has pointed out, the "Progressives were not afraid to introduce the coercive force of law" in dealing with children. Indeed, Progressives had unlimited faith in the state to become a surrogate parent whose power to deal with errant but educable children should be unrestrained.<sup>2</sup> A favorite Progressive tactic for dealing with juvenile delinquency, therefore, was the establishment of state-operated correc-

tional facilities where children were to be taught to develop resources that would insure their survival even in vice- and poverty-ridden industrial America. These facilities, intended as substitute homes, had administrators who served as surrogate parents for wayward but not-yet-lost juveniles. As a result, this put the governors of such facilities in the position of having, as Bothman has written, “to administer, all ironies and confusion intended, non-institutional institutions. Their routines had to be not only normal—that is, approximating life in the outside community—but intimate—recreating the close ties of the family.”<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, the unbounded faith in the state-as-parent created an early twentieth-century juvenile justice system which gave judges and institutional superintendents almost total power over “delinquents” without giving them the economic, philosophical or political wherewithal to accomplish their avowed goals. Not surprisingly, by the mid-1930s, at least one major study of the nation’s juvenile justice system soundly condemned the system and argued that nearly 90 percent of the nation’s juvenile delinquents were becoming recidivists.<sup>4</sup>

A detailed look at one Midwestern facility for juvenile delinquents graphically illustrates how ill-prepared and unequipped were the facility’s operators to handle their charges. The Missouri Industrial Home for Negro Girls at Tipton housed more than one thousand black juveniles between the time it opened in 1916 and its closing in 1956.<sup>5</sup> Throughout that forty-year period, the institution generally failed to help its inmates prepare to enter the mainstream of American life. Political patronage determined who would govern the institution, leaving well-meaning but ineffective leaders, with poorly-trained staffs, to deal with an often too-large number of girls whose background and behavior would have challenged even the most sophisticated juvenile delinquency experts.

This essay focuses primarily on life in the Missouri Industrial Home during the 1930s, not because that decade is more important than any other, but because through historical accident the case files of seventy-seven inmates incarcerated during that period have been deposited in the Missouri State Archives and are available to researchers. The rarity of such records becoming available to historians makes their use all the more imperative.

The seventy-seven girls whose files have been spared the ravages of time represent slightly more than 25 percent of the number of inmates incarcerated during the decade of the thirties. While it would be impossible to say categorically that the seventy-seven were “typical” of all Tipton residents during those years, they were typical in at least two important ways. First of all, their average age was 14.39 years upon entering the institution. Secondly, 83 percent of them came from the urban areas of Kansas City and St. Louis (see Tables 1 and 2).

Ethel Bowles, a black woman (Figure 1), served as Superintendent of the Missouri Industrial Home for Negro Girls for most of the 1930s. Bowles’s appointment to head the training school was clearly the result of political patronage.<sup>6</sup> Democratic Governor Guy E. Park’s election as



FIGURE ONE: Ethel Bowles, Superintendent of the Missouri Home for Negro Girls through most of the 1930s. Courtesy of the Missouri State Archives.

governor in 1932 ended twelve consecutive years of Republican rule and the blacks who helped to carry out that coup expected to be rewarded.<sup>7</sup> A Republican superintendent of the Home, Elizabeth Shelby, still held office at the time. But, as one staunch Democrat indicated to Park, the Tipton job represented “the highest office for Negro Democrats in Missouri,” and party loyalists expected the Republican to be removed.<sup>8</sup>

Park complied with requests to remove Shelby and sought the advice of a St. Louis group known as “the Negro Democratic Organization” in his search for her replacement. That group offered the name of Ethel Bowles as “the one woman in St. Louis who is particularly well-equipped for this position and whose appointment would be well received by all of the leaders of the Negro Democratic Party and mutually satisfactory to the Negro Race of Missouri.”<sup>9</sup>

Bowles got the job, taking over in June 1933, at the age of thirty-nine. A graduate of the Knoxville Normal College and the Chicago School of Dramatic Arts, she taught history, civics and Latin at Lincoln Institute [later Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri] and served as secretary to the president of that school from 1916 to 1920. An active member of a number of St. Louis social service agencies, Bowles administered the distribution of welfare benefits to St. Louis County blacks for several years prior to her Tipton appointment. That work experience, rather than any formal training, made her the first professional social worker to govern the Industrial Home.<sup>10</sup>

The facility that Bowles took over in mid-1933 still reflected not only the goals of its founders, but also their biases. The legislators who voted to create Tipton were frankly troubled over the question of what to do with black female juvenile delinquents. Late nineteenth-century white girls who ran afoul of the law in Missouri were sent to a home in Chillicothe. Although Missouri law did not prohibit sending black girls there, custom

did. The Home's superintendent wrote in 1903 that accepting "colored girls" into the institution "would create a disturbance among the inmates and virtually put an end to the reformatory features of the institution. . . . " Subsequently, a separate building for blacks was erected at the Chillicothe facility, but overcrowding caused the building to be used for whites instead.<sup>11</sup>

In 1908, the problem of no Home for black girls came to a head when a twelve-year-old girl was sent to the Missouri State Penitentiary. Shocked by the spectacle of a child serving time with hardened criminals, the Missouri legislature appropriated money to establish the State Industrial Home for Negro Girls the next year. Difficulty in finding a community that would allow a correctional facility for black girls to be built in its midst postponed the opening of the Tipton Home until 1916.<sup>12</sup> (See Figures 2-8)

The law which appropriated the money for the Home empowered the state to incarcerate any black girl between the ages of seven and twenty-one who committed a crime not punishable by death or life imprisonment "whose associations are immoral or criminal, or bad and vicious, or who is incorrigible to such extent that she cannot be controlled by her parents or guardians in whose custody she may be. . . ."<sup>13</sup> Once these "delinquent colored girls" had been rescued from a nascent life of crime and placed in the Tipton institution, officials there resolved to structure their lives around "meaningful" labor in an atmosphere that was as much like a home as possible. If, as the commissioners who planned and oversaw the facility believed, strength of character was a natural result of a good family life, then Missouri's black female delinquents would have a good family. Indeed, the commissioners reported in their "first Biennial Report" that the manager of the institution was to be "known as Mother" and that she would teach the girls "the many little things taught children by a mother."<sup>14</sup>

The goal of these original formulators of reform school policy was summarized in this first Biennial Report:

The idea of the present board is to equip each girl with a thorough knowledge of household work and the duties of a housekeeper, so that they may readily find good homes because of their efficiency. It is the intention to teach them to cook, scrub, wash, iron, sew, mend, care of chickens, bees, garden, small fruits, in short, to be thoroughly qualified domestics or housekeepers, and it will be our aim to cultivate in them a love of country life, and to find homes for them in the country. Believing that a knowledge of the care of poultry may be a means of livelihood to many of our girls, they are being trained in the profitable care of chickens. The improvement in the department of unruly girls assigned to the care of poultry is quite noticeable. Having something that is alive and helpless committed to their care arouses good thoughts and impulses, and reclamation is thereby made easier. The same theory holds in the beneficent results from gardening.<sup>15</sup>

This education in the domestic arts was to take place in a school that went

through the eighth grade and which was heavily laced with religious guidance. Indeed, God, “Mother” and domesticity became the Missouri Industrial Home for Negro Girls’ own trinity.<sup>16</sup>

This emphasis on vocational training for black girls reflected contemporary attitudes toward the role blacks and women should play generally in American society. Booker T. Washington’s philosophy of developing marketable skills rather than intellectual acumen still influenced most *black and white* thinking about how blacks should be prepared for adult life.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, early twentieth-century girls who had no parents to care adequately for them were supposed to learn skills that would allow them to survive until they could achieve the *real* purpose of their existence: marriage to a good man who would take care of them. Learning the “domestic arts,” then, had a double advantage: it not only made girls marketable, but marriageable as well.<sup>18</sup>

Ethel Bowles did nothing to change the purpose or practices of the Missouri Industrial Home for Negro Girls. She, like all her predecessors, insisted upon being called “Mother” and she declared it her aim “to help these young girls make their adjustments by changing mental attitudes, removing ignorance, rebuilding health, and instilling a moral code which reveals their responsibility to themselves, to their family, to their community, and to their God.”<sup>19</sup> Bowles proposed to do this through a strict regimen of work, worship and play. While she did not consider “academic” education unimportant, she saw the main purpose of learning to be “to fit [the girls] for service” to their communities.<sup>20</sup> Aware that “the larger proportion of our girls find an outlet for making a livelihood by cooking and serving,” she acknowledged that learning domestic skills was particularly stressed.<sup>21</sup>

It was one thing to express the intention of remoulding the character and habits of delinquent girls; quite another to accomplish it. The facility was over-crowded for one thing, making it very difficult to give the girls the close attention they needed so desperately. When Bowles took over in mid-1933, the Home housed eighty girls, five more than its capacity, as defined by a State Survey Commissioner.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, money for a well-trained staff was always in short supply. Throughout the institution’s existence, for example, its employees were paid considerably less than similarly-employed whites at the Chillicothe Home for White Girls.<sup>23</sup>

The best that Bowles could do in her effort to change her errant charges was to adopt the system of discipline used by her predecessors which had come to be known as the Merit System.<sup>24</sup> Two merits were given each day for perfect performance in the following categories:

1. Work { Kind—good, bad or indifferent  
Punctuality  
Alertness
2. Conduct
3. Attitude
4. Personal Appearance
5. Sportsmanship<sup>25</sup>



FIGURE TWO: Missouri Industrial Home for Negro Girls as it appeared in the 1930s. Courtesy of the Missouri State Archives.

FIGURE THREE: Inmates in front of main building, Missouri Industrial Home for Negro Girls, probably early 1930s. Courtesy of the Missouri State Archives.



FIGURE FOUR: Inside of basement room of Missouri Industrial Home for Negro Girls, now the Missouri Department of Corrections and Human Resources Pre-Release Center, 1981. Courtesy of Gary Kremer.

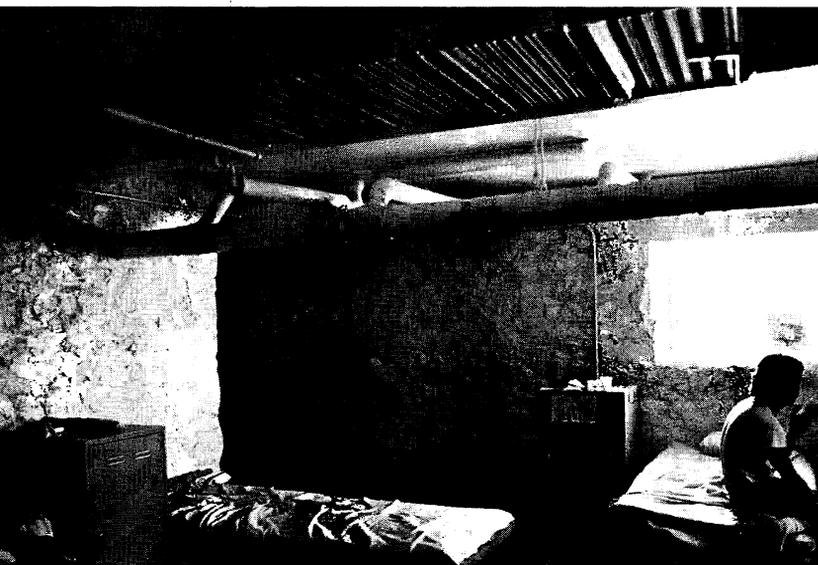


FIGURE FIVE: Aerial photo of Missouri Industrial Home for Negro Girls, December 23, 1934. Courtesy of the Missouri State Archives.

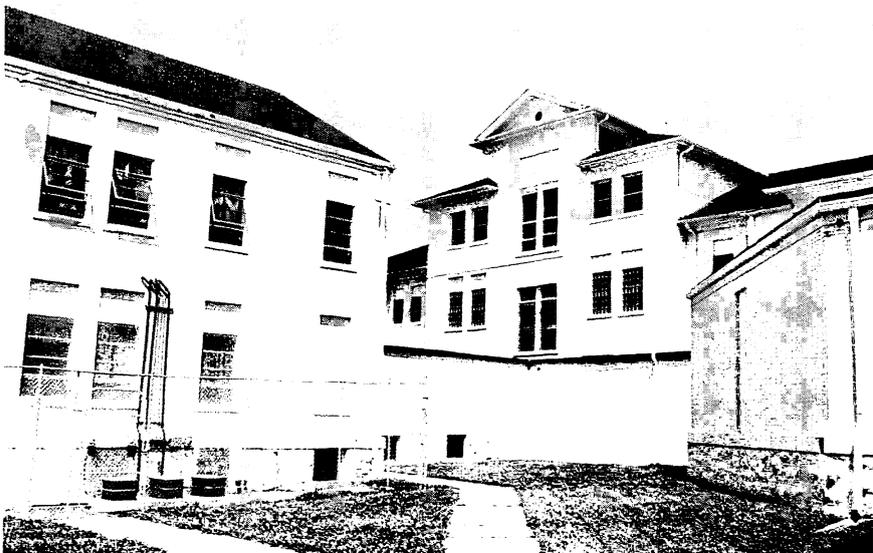


FIGURE SIX: Front of the Missouri Department of Corrections and Human Resources Pre-Release Center as it appears in the 1980s. Courtesy of Gary Kremer.



FIGURE SEVEN: Side view of the Missouri Industrial Home, now the Missouri Department of Corrections and Human Resources Pre-Release Center, 1981. Courtesy of Gary Kremer.

FIGURE EIGHT: Rear view of the Missouri Industrial Home, now the Pre-Release Center, 1981. Courtesy of Gary Kremer.



In addition, Bowles added a new twist to the Merit System. In an effort to ensure uniformity of behavior and a strict sense of order, she divided the inmates into four groups, each with opportunities to earn various privileges. Consistent perfect performance under the Merit System placed one in the most prestigious group, the “C.O.Cs” (Cream of the Crop). This group had “the highest honors, privileges, etc. [wore] nice dresses and [was] eligible to leadership.” At the other end of the scale, a “Fourth Group” of girls enjoyed a “minimum of privileges.”<sup>26</sup> A private investigative body, the Osborne Association, in a 1938 report, described how dress was used to reward and punish:

Group One [C.O.C.] has no uniform, each girl being permitted to choose her own dresses; Group Two wears pin-striped shirtwaists and skirts; Group Three wears striped overalls, and Group Four is dressed in blue denim work dresses.<sup>27</sup>

Monthly evaluations which tallied the merits earned by each girl contain brief comments regarding her strengths and weaknesses. Positive comments frequently found on Monthly Reports of girls with high merit point accumulations and Cream of the Crop status reflected a girl’s apparent pliability and the relative ease with which she could be managed. This attitude is reflected in such statements as: “Anxious to please—does her very best and tries to do her whole duty and learn,”<sup>28</sup> “willing, over-anxious to win favors, easily handled,”<sup>29</sup> “wholesome, clean, obedient, reliable,”<sup>30</sup> and, the curiously “positive” statement of appreciation that a particular girl “seems reconciled to her fate.”<sup>31</sup> Alternatively, criticism often clearly revealed what kinds of behavior were considered unacceptable: “Must yet learn neatness and remember all girls are extremely forgetful. Keeping them busy may greatly alleviate the defect,”<sup>32</sup> “fussy, hard to get along with,” “not interested, very, very poor worker . . . ,” “Doesn’t apply herself seriously to anything,” “worst trait: deceitfulness, quarrelsome,”<sup>33</sup> “sore because she’s here,”<sup>34</sup> and, “Worst trait: refusing to tell on others.”<sup>35</sup> Exactly what the matron meant who wrote on one girl’s evaluation that “hope” was her worst trait remains unclear, but presumably it meant an unwillingness to adjust to the reality of life at Tipton. Indeed, nothing unsettled the Superintendent and her staff more than an uncooperative inmate with a “bad attitude.” The Osborne Association’s 1938 report notes that Bowles, “In answer to a direct question as to what are considered the most serious offenses . . . stated that a ‘bad attitude’ is considered much more serious than any overt acts. . . .”<sup>36</sup>

Supplementing the merit system as a means of internal control was another incentive: the prospect of early release from the institution for good behavior. Girls who compiled a higher number of merit points could look forward to getting out “on 7/12 time, (serv[ing] 7 months out of each year). . . .” Efforts were made to parole girls to “The most desirable homes . . .” and always with the reminder that “they are subject to return any time for misconduct or violation of instruction measured out to them.”<sup>37</sup>

The merit system and the possibility of parole were the most publicized tools of control used by “Mother” Bowles. Less talked about was the resort to corporal punishment when all else failed. Bowles’s biennial reports to the legislature make no mention of physical punishment and give the impression that punishment was entirely negative: the withholding or withdrawal of privileges and rewards. But corporal punishment was used and, although Bowles indicated to the Osborne Association that “We . . . are earnestly striving to eliminate this type of punishment,” she offered the following justification for whippings:

Some of our girls come to us wholly untrained, unbelievably near the animal stage without the least rudimental knowledge of clean and decent living and with no respect for law and order. We have found that the nearest approach to them is through fear. Then we are able to develop “Pride” and “Self Respect” and make them realize that they *must* respect some authority or observe some rules of law and order. If not, they will be hurt physically their bodies are the only things they are conscious of, apparently.<sup>38</sup>

One of the most graphic examples of Bowles’ use of corporal punishment appears in the case file of a nineteen-year-old St. Louis girl named Clara, labeled by Bowles as “a sex problem.” Clara was a member of the C.O.C. group until she “became involved” sexually with another girl. According to Bowles’s testimony, she demoted Clara to the Fourth Group and placed her in “isolation” after discovering her homosexual behavior. Subsequently, another girl named Alice managed to sneak into Clara’s room for a night of sexual activity with her. Both girls were then locked in their respective rooms “and not allowed to mingle with the rest of the girls for 2½ months.”

The two girls were finally released from their rooms after promising to stay away from each other. They did not, and this time the threat of further punishment evoked a violent response in Clara. According to Bowles’s account, she was punishing yet another girl (by cutting her hair) when Clara entered the room and, after a brief exchange of words, tried to wrestle the scissors from Bowles, shouting that she would never submit to having her hair cut *again*. Ultimately, it took Bowles, her husband, a matron and the night watchman to subdue Clara. Bowles described Clara as the worst case she had had since becoming Superintendent (at the time, five years) and bluntly told Col. J. E. Matthews, Director of the Department of Penal Institutions, that:

I have punished this girl many times during the four years she has been here, even whipped her in December, but she had always admitted I was right and that she more than deserved whatever punishment she received.

In view of Clara’s intransigence, Bowles recommended she be “returned to the Court as an incorrigible whom we are unable to handle at the Industrial School for Negro Girls.”<sup>39</sup>

The case of Clara illustrates that homosexuality was a problem at the

Home, although just how widespread it was would be impossible to say. David Rothman contends that “sexual offenses were invariably among the leading three or four causes of disciplinary action” in early twentieth-century homes for juvenile delinquents.<sup>40</sup> No statistics are available on the incidence of homosexual behavior and even if there were, they would be very unreliable, inasmuch as a great deal of such behavior must have gone undetected. Also, matrons often defined girls merely as “sex problems,” by which they meant *both* masturbation and homosexuality.<sup>41</sup>

That homosexuality caused both *institutional* and *individual* tension is clearly evident in the case of a young girl named Lillian, who was thought to have “more intelligence than the average” at Tipton. Her case history reveals that her “conduct was almost perfect with the exception of the sex problem. She was usually in the C.O.C. but would occasionally become involved and drop to the 4th group. She was seldom in between. Eith[er] the top or the bottom.”<sup>42</sup>

Not only did Lillian suffer the loss of privileges that came with a demotion to the Fourth Group; but also she lost self-respect because she had disgraced herself and disappointed Mother Bowles. Her letters reveal her own inner conflict as she pleaded for both understanding and forgiveness, acknowledging at once that her behavior was deviant and immoral but that she was unable to change it:

I'm writing this against my will, but not for my benefit, but for the benefit of others I have gotten in trouble with. You have beat me, and you have done everything that you could do to break me of the most disgraceful habit that one could have. . . . Please lock me up forever, I can't live like this and I don't want to. I've tried but I never go any length of time before I fall again for the same thing. So let me go, you have wasted too much precious time on me and it is in me and I know it, but you don't know. . . . I try to have some respect for myself.<sup>43</sup>

Lillian's release was contingent upon her ability to control her homosexual encounters. Arrangements had been made to parole the young woman to a family that had already arranged for her to finish high school. But when Lillian's future foster parents found out about her homosexual activities, they refused to take her. This change of heart nearly destroyed Lillian. Her feelings of complete abandonment and hopelessness are evident in a letter of Superintendent Bowles, written a few weeks after her date of release was canceled. Again, the letter abounds with expressions of appreciation and apologies and pleas for forgiveness:

I hope you will not misunderstand my letter or think me ungrateful for I don't mean to be. . . . I'm more than grateful for everything that you have done for me[,] knowing that my conduct all along [has] not been worthy. . . . Mr. and Mrs. Carter are the only people that I have [believed] in, that I would have like[d] to stay with except my father and if they wouldn't take me . . . [I] have decide[d] to go home [and] make the best of whatever I will have to face. . . . I do want to go home to my father, tho [*sic*] I feel as tho

there is nothing for me to live for but I know there must be something. . . . But I will always be grateful toward you with all my heart.<sup>44</sup>

Lillian's pledge to be forever grateful to Mother Bowles did not reflect the attitude of all the Industrial Home's inmates. The desire of Bowles and her staff for order and stability in the Home often clashed with the inmates' wish for freedom and flexibility. As a result, tension between the two groups remained high. The girls were often torn between a feeling of gratitude for efforts made on their behalf and a resentment of the restrictions placed upon them. One girl who had been in Tipton for ten years wrote two letters to Mrs. Bowles asking for more privileges. She began both letters with obsequious acknowledgements of Bowles's efforts to help her rehabilitate herself but went on to say that she needed much more than that:

. . . Mother, couldn't I just be free. . . . Just let me be free, I could help around here and like that—anything so that I could be free and could have good time. . . . Tomorrow I'll be nineteen. . . . I wonder what it would be like to be free and could stay up as long as you like and see a movie or go in swimming or something like that. . . . I want to get loose to see people and mingle with them . . . Please don't keep me any longer; Mother, if only you could understand . . . the constant grind of things, day after day and year after year is really getting me. Mother, please.<sup>45</sup>

Sometimes tension manifested itself in fights that broke out between the inmates. Violent responses to restrictions came from girls in all merit groups. Girls were still torn, however, between a need to assert their individuality and the guilt which resulted from having failed to abide by the rules. One inmate felt compelled to apologize not only to the girls on her hall but also to Superintendent Bowles after having been in a fight. She wrote that she realized "that I done wrong by fighting[;] after [everything] was over I was really & truly [sorry]. Just to think that I am a Super C.O.C. and letting something like that [get] the best of me. But I have ask[ed] the hall for pardon, and they has [*sic*] forgiven me. Now I am asking you because I think it is my duty."<sup>46</sup>

Occasionally tension gave way to despair, as in the case of a St. Louis girl named Willa, whose parody of the 23rd Psalm was found in her Bible:

Mother Bowles is My Shephard.  
I am in want. She maketh me to lie  
down on the floor. She leadeth me  
beside starvation. She torments  
my soul. She leadeth me in the  
path of death for her name sakes.  
Yea tho I walk thru the valleys of  
the shadow of death I fear evil  
for she is with me. Her rod and  
her staff they beat me.  
She breaks down my defence in

the presence of mine enemies.  
She annointest my head with whelps.  
My cup is empty. surely hatred  
and revenge shall follow me all  
the days of my life and I shall  
dwell in hell for ever and ever.<sup>47</sup>

Willa's prediction that she would "dwell in hell for ever and ever" may have been prophetic for most of the Tipton girls. No records were kept of what actually happened to inmates once they left Tipton. Throughout the 1930s, there was no systematic plan for monitoring the behavior of released girls. As one historian of the Home has written, "the only kind of supervision which they had was through correspondence from girls, some cooperation from state social agencies, and the cooperation of the Federated Women's Clubs of Missouri," whose members served as volunteer social workers.<sup>48</sup>

All that Superintendent Bowles and her staff could do was try to find a family which was willing to allow a girl to move in with them once a sentence had been completed. That did not always work out for the best, as letters to Mrs. Bowles make clear. At least 31 of the 77 girls whose case files survive for the scrutiny of the historian continued to write letters "Home" to Tipton after being released. These letters contain expressions of gratitude to Tipton officials for their help and abundant apologies and pleas for help from those who were still struggling to adapt.

The girls who continued a correspondence with Bowles still viewed her as "Mother" and looked to her to provide the same sense of stability, order and well-being she had tried to give them at Tipton. Mother Bowles's teachings, the memory of them if not the practice, extended beyond the gates of the institution for many of the girls. Unfortunately, the memory of Tipton, its structured atmosphere, its "meaningful" tasks, only intensified the lack of such structure and meaning in the girls' life outside.

One St. Louis girl named Lucille corresponded with Bowles for almost four years after she was released. Life outside of Tipton was very hard for Lucille; she was ill and unable to work a great part of the first year she was free. She wrote asking for money and "a photo of mother to remember you by as [you] was so dear . . . and forgave all the mistakes [I] made." She continuously reported to Bowles that she "took [her] advice and took the right way" unlike so many other Tipton alumni she heard about.<sup>49</sup> When she was finally well enough to work and found a job, she was called a nigger by her employer, quit her job as a result and when asked twice to return, refused. She worried that she had done the wrong thing and sought Bowles's counsel—and more money. Though there is no record of Bowles having sent the money, she did send encouragement, telling Lucille "keep your head up and remember my teachings."<sup>50</sup>

Another girl from St. Louis, named Hattie, suffered acutely from homesickness for Tipton, felt extremely lonely and desperate, and was unable to find work or resist the temptations that Mother Bowles repeatedly warned her against. In a letter to Hattie's probation officer, Bowles wrote:

Hattie is very smart, a good student, quiet and obedient and she has a sweet disposition. . . . Her main weakness as I see it is no 'back bone.' No 'will power' to resist temptation. Easily led.

With a little help she can develop into a very useful woman. Without encouragement and help she will be just another little 'Lady of the Evening' as she is very nice looking.<sup>51</sup>

Bowles's fears were not unfounded. Hattie searched desperately for jobs during the depressed years of the thirties with no luck. Desperate, she confessed to Bowles that she almost "slipped down" and "went back to what [she] came from," but was "saved" by a woman who gave her a job in a cafe.<sup>52</sup> More than a year and many jobs later, Hattie wrote:

I certainly know what unpreparedness can do for a person who has been away and in for four years. . . . I really have learned what little a girl can do.

I tried several [jobs] and then found out about my condition. I hadn't been back hardly two months before it happened, however I am glad for one thing it is a boy and after all its men that gets [*sic*] the breaks. He's a very sweet little piece of humanity and is me all over again . . . I love him dearly.

I have not been good and have not had any encouragement to be good. . . . I am not married nor receiving any help. When one errors, [one] must pay—so I am paying. You know I know I have been so wrong until it just hurts my heart. I have learned a lot about life.<sup>53</sup>

Superintendent Bowles responded immediately and congratulated Hattie on the birth of her son and sent him money. She told Hattie she hoped the baby would "have a lovely disposition . . . but more WILL power" than his mother. She closed the letter with the following question and "motherly" advice:

Tell me, Dear, why do you stay at the Grand Central [Hotel]? Remember your boy must grow up to be proud of you—not ashamed.

Please do not think I am trying to preach—I am so concerned with your future. I do not want you to make any more mistakes. We all have to make some—but we do not have to wallow in them, do we?<sup>54</sup>

Another girl who had difficulty adjusting to freedom was a Kansas City youth named Leona. In April of 1935, Leona, recently paroled to an aunt in Kansas City, wrote to "Mother Bowles" about what a "nice home" Aunt Bessie had provided for her and how good she had been. She assured the Superintendent that she had "remembered every thing that you told me," adding "every thing that you told me was for my own good." She closed her letter by telling Mother that she was actively involved in a church group and that she was "trying to live the right kind of life. . . ." She signed the letter "from your Daughter."<sup>55</sup>

Apparently this girl's aunt felt that the former Tipton inmate was doing

well also, for she too wrote to Mrs. Bowles explaining “how nice Leona . . . is getting along.” Aunt Bessie heaped praise on Mrs. Bowles, telling her that “I feel proud as you are doing great work in training the girls . . . ,” adding that “I will all ways pray for you that you will have all the best of luck.”<sup>56</sup>

Despite Aunt Bessie’s faith in the near-miraculous transformation of her young niece, the amiable relationship fell apart by mid-summer. On July 24, 1935, Bessie wrote to Mrs. Bowles, informing her that she was uncertain about Leona’s whereabouts. She complained that her efforts to help Leona live as a Christian had failed. Leona, she wrote, “wanted to go out and around bad places and have gangs of Boys laying around my home.” Leona “talked bad” to her and “made lots of trouble at my home.” She left Aunt Bessie’s home after a particularly heated argument and stayed away for several days. When she returned apologetically asking to be taken in again, she and Aunt Bessie got into another fight and this time Leona left for good.<sup>57</sup>

It is impossible to say how many of the girls who left Tipton ended up like Leona—well-intentioned and ostensibly resocialized, but unable to move comfortably back into the mainstream of society. They *had never been* in the mainstream of society, and little that happened to them at Tipton altered the fact of their marginality. Not only did they have to overcome their own poor upbringing and poor family environment, they had to do it in a state whose Jim Crow system was firmly entrenched (even in the Tipton Home) and a nation whose attitude toward women was that they should remain decidedly subservient to and dependent upon men. And, as if all that was not obstacle enough to overcome, the inmates of the thirties had to return to a society sorely afflicted with the woes of the Great Depression. No wonder the odds favored recidivism.

Ethel Bowles and her co-workers could do little to help. They meant well—they cared about their charges and they wanted to be of assistance. But, first of all, they did not know how. They owed their jobs more to political loyalty than to professional training in how to deal with juvenile delinquents. Even if they had been well-trained, however, their case-loads were too heavy to give these girls who so needed help the kind of personal attention they required. As a result, Bowles and her matrons found themselves unable to be more than custodians of a building full of delinquents and their priority became the smooth running of the institution, not the reformation of its inhabitants. There simply was not time, money or knowhow to do that.

Nor were there the resources to support or even keep track of girls who left the strict confines of the Home. In most instances, paroled girls did not go to the untroubled rural environments the founders of the Home had envisioned. Indeed, they usually went right back into the same environment which had contributed to their incarceration. The power of the state had removed these girls from that environment only temporarily. During that interim, however, neither the girls nor the environment changed appreciably. Whatever good intentions had motivated the people who built

the system, the state-as-parent failed the black juvenile delinquents of the Missouri Industrial Home for Negro Girls.

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TABLE 1:

Ages at Which Girls Were Admitted to Tipton—1930s

Year	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	Total	Ave. Age
1930			2	8	1	4				15	14.46
1931	1	1	7	9	11	15	4	2		50	14.98
1932		1	5	6	8	5	1			26	14.53
1933			5	3	11	10	3			32	15.09
1934		2	2	7	5	8	2			26	14.80
1935			2	2	5		3			12	15.00
1936		1	1	9	8	13	1			33	15.03
1937			5	6	12	5	3		1	32	14.96
1938			4	11	7	14	1		2	39	15.07
1939		2	4	13	6	6	1			32	14.40
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TABLE 2:

Place of Residence of Girls Admitted to Tipton—1930s

Year	St. Louis City	Jackson County	Combined	Other	Total
1930	2 (13%)	8 (53%)	10 (66%)	5	15
1931	26 (52%)	14 (28%)	40 (80%)	10	50
1932	10 (38%)	11 (42%)	21 (80%)	5	26
1933	18 (56%)	9 (28%)	27 (84%)	5	32
1934	17 (65%)	4 (15%)	21 (80%)	5	26
1935	2 (17%)	4 (33%)	6 (50%)	6	12
1936	15 (45%)	14 (42%)	29 (87%)	4	33
1937	12 (38%)	14 (44%)	26 (82%)	6	32
1938	21 (54%)	9 (23%)	30 (77%)	9	39
1939	20 (61%)	5 (15%)	25 (26%)	8	33
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notes

1. This paper draws heavily upon the conceptual framework provided by David J. Rothman in *Conscience and Convenience: The Asylum and Its Alternatives in Progressive America* (Boston, 1980). For additional background on the philosophies behind early twentieth-century juvenile asylums and the importance of children to Progressives, see Steven L. Schlossman, *Love & the American Delinquent; The Theory and Practice of "Progressive" Juvenile Justice, 1825-1920* (Chicago, 1977), and Anthony Platt, *The Child Savers* (Chicago, 1969).

2. Rothman, 207.

3. *Ibid.*, 262.

4. *Ibid.*, 286.

5. The only history of the Missouri Industrial Home for Negro Girls remains Nancy Ellen Cole's "Missouri Industrial Home for Negro Girls, Tipton, Missouri, 1909-1944," M. A. thesis, Washington University, 1946. The authors wish to express their gratitude to Mrs. Cole for granting them access to her thesis and for helping in the preparation of this article.

6. According to Cole, "the control by the Governor over the State Industrial Home for Negro Girls had the most disastrous results throughout its history. Almost without exception . . . appointments were apparently made solely on the basis of political loyalty." Cole, "Missouri Industrial Home for Negro Girls," 30.

7. For the role of Missouri blacks in the 1932 election, see Larry H. Grothaus, "The Negro in Missouri Politics, 1890-1941," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Missouri-Columbia, 1970, chapter IV.

8. Mrs. A. G. Gordon to Governor Park, June 12, 1933. For a similar sentiment about the prestige of the Tipton position, see Casimir J. Welch to Sam O. Hargus, June 17, 1933. Guy B. Park Papers, Western Historical Manuscripts, State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia. The authors wish to thank Mrs. Henrietta Park Krause for allowing them access to the Park Papers.

9. William L. Igoe to Governor Park, March 20, 1933; C. S. McClellan, D. M. Grant, William A. Swanson to William I. Igoe, March 28, 1933. Park Papers. Traditionally, a woman was appointed superintendent and her husband manager of the institution. In Bowles's case, there was some concern about her husband Daniel, a St. Louis lawyer, formerly having been a Republican. At the time of Mrs. Bowles's application, her husband described himself as an Independent. He appears in the *Official Manual* of the State of Missouri as a Democrat. Missouri, *Official Manual 1933-1934*, 795.

10. Biographical sketches of Ethel and Daniel Bowles. Enclosure, William I. Igoe to Governor Park, March 30, 1933, Park Papers.

11. Cole, "Missouri Industrial Home for Negro Girls," 10-13.

12. *Ibid.*: "Report of Commission for State Industrial School for Negro Girls," 47th General Assembly (1913), Missouri, House and Senate *Journals, Appendix*, II, 4.

13. *Laws of Missouri 1913*, 139-140. The law which applied to white girls was identical to the law for blacks, except that it did not include the word "Negro." The 1913 statute was revised in 1919 and 1923. The 1923 law limited the ages of white girls from 12 to 21 and black girls from 10 to 21. *Laws of Missouri 1923*, 127-128.

14. "Biennial Report of the State Industrial Home for Negro Girls," 1915-1916," 49th General Assembly (1917) Missouri, House and Senate *Journals, Appendix*, 6. (Hereafter referred to as "Biennial Report.")

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

17. August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915. Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (Ann Arbor, 1963). Missouri blacks were heavily influenced during these years by a state-supported Missouri Negro Industrial Commission, led initially by N. C. Bruce, one of Booker T. Washington's students. The Commission, formed in 1918, resolved to urge and stimulate "our race's old time loyalty, fidelity and hearty, persistent labor." "Report of Negro Industrial Commission," 50th General Assembly (1919), Missouri, House and Senate *Journals, Appendix*, 4. See, also, subsequent biennial reports of the Commission for the twenties and the thirties.

18. Commenting on early twentieth-century women in the work force, historian Peter Filene has written: "For very few of these women was employment anything like a glorious adventure. The great majority labored long, menially, and patiently in domestic service (36 percent), manufacturing (24 percent), and agriculture (15 percent). . . . Most worked because they had to, not because they wanted to. . . . The young, single wage earner might enjoy the chance to be away from home and to spend her income on new dresses, but she was awaiting a husband to rescue her from the factory, the department store, or someone else's kitchen." Peter Gabriel Filene, *Him/Her/Self: Sex Roles in Modern America* (New York, 1976), 26.

19. "Biennial Report" (1935), 435-436.

20. *Ibid.*, 437.

21. *Ibid.*, 443; Cole, "Missouri Industrial Home for Negro Girls," 139-140.

22. There were eighty-two girls in the Tipton Home on December 31, 1932. The daily average number of girls for 1932 was 82.3. "Biennial Report," (1933), 452; Cole, "Missouri Industrial Home for Negro Girls," 22.

23. Cole, "Missouri Industrial Home for Negro Girls," 78.

24. According to Rothman, virtually all early twentieth-century "training schools" for juvenile delinquents followed "a merit and demerit system." Rothman, 277.

25. "Biennial Report," (1935), 436.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Quoted in Cole, "Missouri Industrial Home for Negro Girls," 149.

28. Case File No. 723, Case Files of Girls Incarcerated in the Missouri Industrial Home for Negro Girls, Record Group No. 213, Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City, Missouri (hereafter referred to as Case files).

29. Case File No. 626.

30. Case File No. 658.

31. Case File No. 653.

32. Case File No. 723.

33. Case File No. 652.

34. Case File No. 660.

35. Case File No. 626.

36. Quoted in Cole, "Missouri Industrial Home for Negro Girls," 157.

37. "Biennial Report" (1933), 434.

38. Quoted in Cole, "Missouri Industrial Home for Negro Girls," 158.

39. Ethel Bowles to Col. J. E. Mathews, July 14, 1938, case File No. 725.

40. Rothman, 276-277.

41. See in particular File No. 681 and File No. 725.

42. Case File No. 594.

43. *Ibid.*
44. Case File No. 594.
45. Case File No. 341.
46. Case File No. 660, undated letter from P. W. to "Dear Mother."
47. Case File No. 677.
48. Cole, "Missouri Industrial Home for Negro Girls," 196.
49. Case File No. 704. Just how much Lucille's compliments of Bowles were designed to get money out of the superintendent would be impossible to say. If, as it appears, Bowles sent her no money, it is significant that she continued the correspondence for four years.
50. *Ibid.*
51. Case File No. 626, Ethel Bowles to Miss Sarah Young, May 22, 1935.
52. Case File No. 626, H.S. to "My Dear Mother," October 5, 1935.
53. Case File No. 626, H.S. to "My Dear Mother," December 8, 1936.
54. Case File No. 626, "Your Mother" to "My dear Hattie," December 15, 1936.
55. Case File No. 596, I.D. to Ethel Bowles, April 15, 1935.
56. Case File No. 596, B.S. to Ethel Bowles, April 15, 1935.
57. Case File No. 596, B.S. to Ethel Bowles, July 24, 1935.