

As American as Apple Pie: Placing the History of Female Midwestern Prisons in Progressive Era Reforms 1870-1930

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Abstract

In 1870, prison inmate advocates, wardens, and leading scientists held a Prison Congress symposium in Cincinnati, Ohio, to discuss the plausibility of segregating the genders in penitentiaries and jails. The lobbying and petitions addressed during the panel discussion would result in the nation's first installation of a female-only prison reformatory in Indianapolis, Indiana. The Indianapolis Women's Reformatory, later re-named the Indianapolis Women's Prison (IWP), was the culmination of a Progressive Era (1880-1930) prison reform movement that was led and executed by then-Governor Conrad Baker and the noted Quakers, Charles and Rhoda Coffin. Often seen by historians as a benevolent reform, the history of the inner-workings of the IWP shows corrupted prisons and inmate abuses.

The first original and successful prison reform movement outside of the men's reformatory movement on the East Coast, the Midwestern model of the women's reformatory is a legacy underrepresented and under researched in current scholarship. For over 140 years, the narratives of the IWP and understandings of the importance of Indiana's deep relationship to prison reform, specifically incarceration policies influenced by the eugenic sciences, have been circulated in smaller, regional academic circles but have failed to penetrate larger historical discussions. This project brings this regional history into dialogue with larger national trends in scholarship on the histories of incarceration and prison reform in the United States.

This project seeks to bring inclusion and awareness of the Midwestern reformatory movement by collaborating with other disciplines, such as psychology and criminology, that largely enrich the genre of prison discourse and history. Furthermore, its focus on the incarceration of women balances the current production of prison narratives that is saturated with research on men's institutions and male inmates. The reformatory institution that was produced by Progressive Era reformers in Indiana has continued to be the standard of prison managements and administrations. Its history shaped America's relationship with mass incarceration, particularly its dearth of rehabilitative efforts.

Résumé

En 1870, plusieurs activistes réformistes du système carcéral, des gardiens et des scientifiques tinrent un Congrès sur la Prison à Cincinnati en Ohio afin de discuter de la possibilité de ségréguer les sexes dans les pénitenciers. Les lobbys et pétitions adressés durant le panel résultèrent dans la première instance aux États-Unis d'une prison pour femmes seulement à Indianapolis en Indiana. La Indianapolis Women's Reformatory, plus tard renommée la Indianapolis Women's Prison (IWP), fut la culmination du mouvement de réforme carcérale de l'Ère Progressive, un mouvement mené par le Gouverneur de l'état Conrad Baker et les Quakers Charles et Rhoda Coffin. Souvent vue par les historiens comme une époque bienfaisante de l'histoire de l'Indiana, la réalité est en fait que le système interne de la IWP était submergé par la corruption et l'abus de ses prisonnières.

En tant que premier mouvement de réformes carcérales à l'extérieur de la Côte Est ayant abouti (ce qui instaura un précédent pour les réformes chez les hommes), le modèle de réforme féminine du Midwest représente un héritage sous-représenté et sous-analysé dans les travaux sur l'incarcération aux États-Unis. Depuis plus de 140 ans, les histoires de la IWP et notre compréhension de l'importante connexion entre l'Indiana et les réformes carcérales (notamment l'eugénisme) ont circulé seulement dans des cercles académiques régionaux et restreints, échouant du fait même à pénétrer une discussion historique plus large. Ce projet fait entrer en dialogue cette histoire régionale avec ces tendances nationales.

Ce projet essaie donc de collaborer avec d'autres disciplines telles que la psychologie et la criminologie afin d'inclure le mouvement de réforme du Midwest parmi l'histoire du discours carcéral. De plus, il est nécessaire de promouvoir un système genré d'analyse afin de contrebalancer la recherche académique qui est présentement saturée par les institutions masculines. L'institution qui fut produite par l'Ère Progressive reste toujours même aujourd'hui le standard en gestion de prisons, et continue encore à influencer la relation des États-Unis avec l'incarcération de masse, notamment son absence totale d'efforts de réhabilitation.

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Introduction

On July 31st, 2017, the Indiana Women's Prison—the oldest women's prison in the United States—was ordered to close by the Indiana Department of Corrections.¹ It had been in operation for over 144 years. Though few today outside of Indianapolis have heard of the Indianapolis Women's Prison, this institution played a central role in the intertwined histories of Progressivism and incarceration in America. Reconstructing the story of this prison's early years allows us to trace the origins of America's unruly relationship with mass incarceration.

The Indiana Women's Prison (IWP) started as an experiment concocted by the Coffin family, Indianapolis Quakers, and then-governor Conrad Baker in 1870 during a Prison Congress meeting in Cincinnati, OH. In attendance at this meeting were 250 delegates from twenty-four different states, who came together to declare a unified set of principles and reform tactics that prioritized benevolent discipline over bodily punishment. The resulting push in Indiana to open a separate state women's facility was unheard of in the United States. With few women prisoners to begin with, many state penitentiaries and county prisons rejected the idea of spending money for separate facilities. However, in the wake of this conference, some states adopted the reformatory model of women's incarceration, and many states went even further and adopted the reformatory model for their men's institutes as well. From 1873 to 1920, roughly twenty-three adult reformatories were opened around the country.² As it turned out, the American prison reformatory system would be a short but influential experiment in the larger context of criminology, and Indiana was at the forefront of the movement.

¹ "Prison in Indianapolis to close this summer," *Indianapolis Associated Press*. June 14, 2017.

² Alexander Pisciotto, "Benevolent Repression: Social Control and the American Reformatory Movement," (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 4.

Conversations around new prison sciences and standards that were taking place in Indiana were also national and transnational conversations. Across the Atlantic Ocean, at Turin University in Italy, where criminology as a discipline was born, a professor of “Criminal Anthropology” named Cesare Lombroso began to write a Darwinian approach to understanding criminal behavior. After publishing several books on his findings about the human body and criminal behavior, Lombroso became known as the father of modern criminology in the 1890s. While many American prison officials and wardens rejected the biological pre-determinism findings of Lombroso, by 1907 Indiana was pioneering new eugenic legislation, including the first legal sterilization implementation. Indiana became an important location where Progressive attitudes and ideas about structured discipline that combined gendered notions of rehabilitation with eugenic ideas about race and inheritance became standard.

While Midwestern history and carceral studies often exist as separate disciplines, the paradigms of Midwestern prisons and Midwestern history reveal much about American capitalism and religious influences when put into conversation.³ The Midwest region was originally inhabited by many East Coast transplants who brought with them their finances and values. Their enthusiasm for new experimentation in democracy and capitalism, along with transnational circulations of eugenic science and criminology, gave them the impetus to rethink established practices in law and civics. Meanwhile, the political and economic climate in Indiana provided the fertile ground for experimental and often radical theories about incarceration and rehabilitation.

³ For the purpose of this paper and condensing information, the term Midwest will follow a different definition that excludes the Great Plains (prairie) region. This paper will engage with historical trends related to: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Since the Midwest is a well-known region that is capitalized, subsequently, Midwestern will be capitalized in this paper.

The Midwest region was important to the history of post-Civil War prison reform because of its rich agricultural and economic advancements as well as burgeoning technological industries. Because of the late establishment of Midwestern states in America's timeline, patterns appear that congruently show the importance of discipline and control of society to that of thriving state economies and technological advancements in industrial migration, i.e., trains and canals. For example, the influence of the primacy of economic interests in the Midwest is illustrated by the origins of policing in Chicago, as the early iteration of the city's police force served at the whim of urban businessmen who tasked them with breaking up unions and protecting private property. This was a far cry from more contemporary conceptions of policing that understand it as existing to guarantee public safety.

As the new Midwestern states produced prominent measurements of economic prosperity, multiple state penitentiaries were simultaneously built. The Progressive Era saw an updated version of convict labor in the Northern territories, perpetuating the actual capitalization of criminals. In short, state penitentiaries and prisons uplifted depressed local economies and were thus attractive institutions for investment in the rapidly growing Midwest in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴

The convict lease system is associated with the American South,⁵ but in fact, the lease system was all over the country. The Midwest was no exception: Illinois employed convict leasing until 1866,⁶ but Missouri had a form of lease contracting until 1917.⁷ Additionally, the

⁴ Marie Gottschalk, *The Prison and the Gallows: In Politics of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 29.

⁵ Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York, NY: Anchor Books (Random House)), 2008. The association with the convict lease system to the Southern region of America became popular by Douglas Blackmon and the PBS documentary of the same title.

⁶ David J. Bodenhamer and Randall T Shephard, *The History of Indiana Law* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006), 106.

13th Amendment explicitly states that slavery can exist when “punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted.”⁸ The language of the 13th Amendment perpetuates the power allotted to prisons and the unyielding force over its inhabitants regardless of race or conviction and further muddles the prisons intrinsic role for society. Prison reformers, including many Quakers, detested the perpetuation of slavery in the form of convict labor, and even went so far as to claim that convict labor was more detrimental than slavery.⁹ The history of prison reform in Indiana was inextricably intertwined with both national political debates about freedom as well as more local and religious movements advocated by Midwestern Quakers and state politicians.

Indiana’s political environment, specifically the competitiveness between Republicans and Democrats for power, was an incubator for compromise and moderation. While the originally derogatory nickname Hoosier was created to describe the rustic countrymen of the state, Indiana’s citizens were active in politics, challenging state traditions on public health socialism, prohibition and women’s suffrage.¹⁰ The reformatory movement reflected both persistent conservative trends as well as how citizens and political leaders sought gradual progressive change.

While the reformatory movement had a challenging, yet momentous upward trajectory before 1900, it was the upkeep of facilities, health programs, and the emergence of criminology

⁷ Jamie Pamela Rasmussen, *The Missouri State Penitentiary* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2012), 31.

⁸ “13th Amendment” Online Constitution Reference, University of Cornell
<https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/amendmentxiii>

⁹ John Howard was a prominent early prison reformer in England during the 1700s. He wrote in his book, *The State of Prisons in England and Wales* that, “A prisoner is potentially in a worse condition than the slave, because the slave is the property of someone who interest is to keep his property in serviceable condition, whereas the prisoner is owned by nobody, unless it be the State which is ultimately responsible for his imprisonment.” John Howard, *The state of prisons in England and Wales: with preliminary observations, and an account of some foreign prisons* (Warrington: William Eyres, 1777), XIII.

¹⁰ James H. Madison, *Hoosiers: A New History of Indiana* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014), 222.

that began to erode the movement. Ultimately, the Great Depression depleted the reformatory movement's efforts and left women's and men's prisons in neglect. The women's prison reformatory movement was successful in creating separate facilities to protect women from blatant sexual abuse and corruption in early penitentiaries, but in the end, it failed to create a long-lasting legacy. While the philosophical goals of the women's reformatory movement may have faded away, other Progressive Era reform trends illustrate America's prominent relationship with capitalism and the social sciences.

This project will document the sixty-year history of the Midwestern women's reformatory movement alongside other criminology trends of the times by presenting state history, state economic history, and the history of nineteenth-century women's civic engagement. This thesis is centered on the fluctuation of the Midwestern prison reformatory movement in America; its path was influenced by state economies and regional efforts from the Religious Society of Friends (also known as the Quakers), the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and other local organizers that combated but failed against the prevailing national trends of capitalism, eugenics, and guidelines of femininity. The choice to bring the American Midwest to the forefront of prison history allows for rich dialogue and analysis around the intersection of Christianity and classificatory sciences, but it is limited due to the lack of academic representation of prison reformers in the larger context of Progressive Era players and policies.

Due to the scarcity of historiography on the women's reformatory movement, interdisciplinary feminist academia has largely been credited for the majority of scholarship on the subject, which forces this project to emphasize the historical trends and regional primary sources of policy makers and prison boards.¹¹ Additionally, this project challenges the outdated,

¹¹ Successful examples of this movement in scholarship are Meda Chesney-Lind, *The Female Offender: Girls, Women, and Crime* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), Carol Smart, *Women, Crime, and Criminology:*

male-focused discourse that dominates mainstream prison studies in order to solidify the reformatory movement's importance within the larger realm of Progressive Era scholarship.

The American reformatory movement was indebted to Midwestern values that inspired the first original penal institutions to be cultivated outside of the East Coast. While the East Coast adopted the reformatory movement soon after Indiana, the Indianapolis model exemplified the movement beyond its cerebral inception. For prison studies, the Midwest contributed influential philosophical theories and principles, whether they had perceived positive or negative outcomes. Moving beyond labeling the movement good or bad, the reformatory movement must be elevated in current scholarship in order to more wholly understand Progressive Era efforts in the center of the social services hub, Chicago, as well as the ways that the larger Midwest region influenced Progressive reform.

There are many reformers, inmates, and policymakers that this project is not capable of exploring further that are important to show in the larger narrative of prison studies. Unfortunately, The United States Federal Government did not mandate a submission of prison annual statistics until 1926, when the National Prison Statistics program was created. Since this project focuses primarily on the time period right before this change in policy, there is a lack of uniform statistical data to use to compare prison to prison; record keeping of criminal details and penal statistics from the Progressive Era had no standard or template to abide by in the early twentieth century.¹² Additionally, census takers and investigators had differing calibers for collecting information as well as differing emphases of data categories that did not match other years or census standards.¹³ Thus many prison historians have difficulty finding and interpreting

A Feminist Critique (Boston, MA: Routledge Pub, 1977), Pamela J Schram and Barbara Koons-Witt, *Gendered (in)Justice: Theory and Practice in Feminist Criminology* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2004).

¹² Blake McKelvey, *A History of Good Intentions* (Montclair, NJ: P. Smith, 1977), 239.

¹³ *Ibid*, 239.

numerical data on admission and release dates, parole statistics, and demographic information in the archives.

This study addresses the necessity of showing the importance of the surrounding events, particularly Indiana's lobbying efforts and scientific observations, which led to prison reform efforts of the Progressive Era. This project does not focus on the stories of individual prisoners nor bring to light the personal horrors of being a female in incarcerated America. For historical research, especially for archivists, the federal census is a constant source of frustration when trying to find fluid timelines for people; women of history are often lost once they are married and their maiden names are replaced. For incarcerated people, an added layer arises when many prisoners choose to change their entire names to shed their past life. Moreover, this study was not able to focus on the experiences of women of color beyond numerical evidence. The reformatory movement in prison history was, unfortunately, geared towards white women and left other marginalized women in the dark and dreary jails.¹⁴

¹⁴ Jocelyn M Pollock, *Women, Prison, and Crime* (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Co, 1990), 3.

Section One

“That what is worth doing at all is worth doing well” The Failure of Indianapolis’

Benevolent Reform in the Regional Midwest 1870-1900¹⁵

Decades before Illinois and Indiana were granted statehood, a regional debate on the East Coast broke out in conjunction with competing prison ideologies. Which system would prevail and impede the modern prison: Pennsylvania’s religious institutional project or New York’s secular study? The Philadelphia Penitentiary system, also known as the Walnut Street experiment, started as a jail to combat overcrowding in the local prison, then later gained penitentiary status and adopted a daily agenda of silence and solitary confinement. Initiated by William Penn and the Pennsylvania Quakers, the Walnut Street experiment supposedly deterred crime by forcing silent labor in the prison with the idea that the prison’s reputation would provoke fear into a possible criminal.¹⁶ Although by 1786 the Quakers had abolished corporal punishment in Pennsylvania and boasted benevolent reform to the American correctional system, their use of solitary confinement was almost as detrimental, as it damages the psyche of an inmate forever, affecting and altering the mind.¹⁷

Congruently, New York’s Auburn system enacted a new penal code to the prison structure, which took two decades to fully achieve. Instead of a complete transformation of an older model, the Auburn system was comparable to the Pennsylvania system in that it upheld the practice of silence when inmates were laboring.¹⁸ To say the prison was inhumane does not adequately describe the horror of the prison policies: food consisted solely of bread and water,

¹⁵ This line is the motto of the prison, found in the Fortieth Annual report by the Board of Trustees, September 30th, 1911.

¹⁶ Lawrence M Friedman, *Crime and Punishment in American History* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 77.

¹⁷ As Michel Foucault elucidated in his text, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

¹⁸ Ibid, 78.

and solitude and silence were enforced by severe punishment. Several instances occurred of inmates trying to commit suicide by banging their heads against the cell bars.¹⁹ Reflections and observations from historian Alexis De Tocqueville paint a picture of the failures of the American prisons from the lack of communication and uniformity of criminal institutions. He writes, “[T]he various branches of government in the United States being almost as independent of each other, as the states themselves, it results that they hardly ever act uniformly and simultaneously.”²⁰ During Pennsylvania and New York’s competition with each other, both states failed to revolutionize the prison system away from the antiquated gallows they wanted to separate themselves from originally.

Understanding this failure is pivotal for the examination of subsequent prison history. While both New York and Pennsylvania had clear images of how the ideal prison should operate in order to help incarcerated citizens, with efforts such as ending capital punishment and public humiliation, they both failed to create environments that promoted rehabilitation. Neither prison experiment challenged the prison system as a whole; instead each focused on smaller details and perpetuated the idea that prisons are normal and even desirable institutions in modern societies. Tocqueville’s writing solidified the prison as a positive colonial institution that should be adopted wholly in the modern world.²¹

Tocqueville’s observations described a layered system of power that just simply grazed the surface of judicial and criminal justice structures in America that prevail today. When

¹⁹ Friedman, *Crime and Punishment in American History*, 79.

²⁰ Alexis De Tocqueville, *On the Penitentiary System in the United States and its Application in France* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard, 1883), 14.

²¹ Angela Davis and Gina Dent. “Prison as a Border: A Conversation on Gender, Globalization, and Punishment,” *Signs* (The University of Chicago Press: Vol. 26, No. 4, Summer, 2001), 1237. In this article, Davis and Dent discuss Tocqueville’s relationship to the perpetual use of the colonial prison in contemporary society. While his observations will continue to be used in overviews of basic prison history, further discussions need to be held to understand that prison should not be a normalized facet of civilized societies. The prison industrial complex cannot co-mingle further with American democracy.

researchers compare and contrast prisons, they must include a multitude of tiers from the city laws, the county laws, and the state laws, while also abiding by federal authority. Complicating this idea further, religious reformers who influenced prison law similarly placed an added tier of pressures for prisons to adhere. Often, this takes the form when dealing with monetary values as well as taxation. This encompasses the failures of the eighteenth-century prisons by highlighting the lack of communication between state prison boards and ultimately, the lack of a unified goal for incarceration standards. Rehabilitation had been common vocabulary after the Revolutionary War and into the Antebellum period, but real effort to promote better welfare and conditions for incarcerated citizens was minimal.

Adding a layer of contention to Tocqueville's observations, in those early competing prisons, women were not present. For the most part, women who were arrested and tried were given fines or jail time, they were not typically sent to a penitentiary or prison. Even after the turn of the nineteenth century, state and prison officials of the early 1800s believed that no prison would ever be necessary for women.²² This practice continued well into the decades before the Civil War, but as a result from the nationwide conflict, the prison population for both men and women increased. The Civil War ushered in a new economic change by readjusting gender roles and broadening definitions of criminal behavior. Rising prosecutions for women accused of crimes finally forced prison officials and developers to acknowledge the need for "a prison within a prison" and allot a certain amount of cells, or a whole department, to female criminality.²³

²² Rasmussen, *The Missouri State Penitentiary*, 33. Rasmussen found that in most early penitentiaries, women were pardoned after their sentencing so they would not have to live in the prisons themselves. Many state officials believed it was more scandalous to have women living in the prisons amongst men, until wardens and prison officials found economic benefit for creating prison industries.

²³ L. Mara Dodge, "'One Female Prisoner is More Trouble Than Twenty Men': Women Convicts in Illinois Prisons, 1835-1896," (*Journal of Social History*, Vol. 32, No. 4, Summer, 1999), 918. A term introduced by Dodge

Incorporating the Midwestern region into conversations about prison history or reform presents limitations in the form of large gaps of information, especially when producing a fluid timeline. While Pennsylvania and New York were embroiled in prison science debates, the Midwest barely had a feasible population of settlers for statehood and no need for large state penitentiaries. Ohio was the first Midwestern state that entered into the union, doing so in 1803, and eventually, Minnesota, the last Midwestern state, was recognized fifty-five years later. Concurrent with active warfare waged by the United States government against Indigenous peoples; many foreign-born Americans moved west to have more open land and agricultural advantages, and enticed other family members to join them in the region. The French had been in the Midwest before it was organized land in the 1700s, trading and organizing with the indigenous tribes. Later, during the founding of Ohio and Indiana, in 1803 and 1816 respectively, German-speaking immigrants soon outnumbered the French. By the start of the 1800s, ten percent of Americans resided west of the Appalachian Mountains, but by the 1820s more and more people were settling close to the banks of the Mississippi River. The fur trade, prairie farming, open land, and growing societies were all enticing factors that led people to the new frontier.

Illinois and Indiana became states in 1818 and 1816, respectively, but did not have substantial population numbers until after the Civil War. Compared to the more eastern cities in Indiana and Illinois, St. Louis, Missouri, was already a flourishing city with a good reputation for export and import standards. Before the Civil War, St. Louis relied heavily on its French roots and looked more promising to bridge the gap between the East and the West. It looked like this prophecy would come true when Illinois was admitted into the Union with the smallest

in her work that adds to Tocqueville's layering of power. Women were not important enough to have their own separate department, let alone rehabilitation.

population of any other state, with just 34,000 residents.²⁴ The population of Illinois was spread all throughout the state, and by 1840 Chicago only had 4,000 of those people.²⁵ For comparison, St. Louis had 16,000 at the same time.²⁶ However, Illinois made a successful turn around and became the population leader by 1890, surprising economists and populists who had seen Illinois as a failing state.

In 1830 it seemed unlikely that Chicago would become the premier city of the Midwest. In today's perspective, it rivals coastal cities like New York City and Los Angeles through economic competition, import/export transportation opportunities, and population. But instead, as Chicago lore historian William Cronon writes, "Chicago became the link that bound the different worlds of the east and west into a single system. In the most literal sense, from 1848 to the end of the nineteenth century, it was where the West began."²⁷ A swamp until 1840,²⁸ the city of Chicago had municipal problems that made this pronouncement seem unlikely; with dead livestock on the streets, and the sewers flooding, Chicago was not a metropolis but as one foreign visitor noted "the City of pestiferous odour."²⁹

A big factor in Chicago's change of direction came when the national economy underwent an industrial metamorphosis that bolstered agrarian trade in the United States. The American railroad mirrored human veins; it connected city-to-city and region-to-region by exporting Chicago's reserve of grain and lumber. The railroad allowed the major cities of this time to trade at a higher level than the outdated canals, and after the completion of the Chicago

²⁴John F. McDonald, *Chicago: An Economic History* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 25. McDonald also continues to write that Illinois most likely falsified population records to be of a higher standard. The population standard set by Congress was 40,000 people and to achieve even their base population, Illinois had to count people who were visiting, and sometimes more than once.

²⁵ Ibid, 30.

²⁶ Ibid, 31.

²⁷ Robert G. Spinney, *City of Big Shoulders: A History of Chicago* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois Press, 2000), 51.

²⁸Ibid, 37.

²⁹ Spinney, *City of Big Shoulders*, 36.

to New York passageway by 1856, Chicago was able to send raw materials all year round without the inevitable freeze during the winter.³⁰ By the end of the 1850s, Illinois had the second largest rail mileage at 2,799 miles a factor that enhanced its profile as a potential economic powerhouse during the second half of the nineteenth century.³¹

The people of the city of Chicago found that with these great transformational advancements in technology, many social welfare problems were otherwise neglected. Female leaders with progressive agendas began to organize in their city to combat “urban problems” that enveloped big cities. Notable organizations were Jane Addams’ Hull House, the Ida B. Wells Club, the Woman’s League, Chicago Women’s Club, and the Illinois Women’s Alliance.³² These clubs and individual women worked for “human betterment,” by holding the government accountable for the health and safety of its citizens and challenging the growing powers of profit-driven corporations.³³ Undoubtedly, charitable women were involved in multiple campaigns for the betterment of Chicago, and also overlapped in organization, class, and social engagements.

Urban progressives who worked to better their homes and cities did not usually focus on prison reform. Whereas jails were located near or in metropolitan cities, the penitentiaries and prisons were located outside of that realm. For “city-folk,” these structures would not be on their radar, and prison reform would have been low on the agenda to tackle when drinking water was contaminated, the city was fearful of anarchists, socialists, and labor unionists (all of whom had little difference in the eyes of the elite), and immigrants were flooding into the “city of the west.” The location of Illinois prisons allowed this negligence to continue: Dwight Correctional was 85

³⁰ McDonald, *Chicago: An Economic History*, 32.

³¹ Ibid, 32.

³² As shown in Maureen A. Flanagan’s book, *Seeing With Their Hearts*, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union was prevalent in Chicago before 1890. After 1890, the organization was a peripheral club that women belonged to, but focused on other clubs.

³³ Maureen A. Flanagan, *Seeing with Their Hearts: Chicago Women and the Vision of the Good City, 1871-1933* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 5.

miles southwest of Chicago, Alton Military Prison was 300 miles southwest, Joliet was 45 miles southwest, Pontiac, the state reformatory, was 114 miles southwest. Simply put, prisoners in Illinois were out of sight, and thus out of mind for the many urban reformers who have come to dominate our historical memory of Progressivism.

In addition to the distance issue, Chicago was wholly focused on several citywide projects and initiatives that drew attention away from its state prisons. Because Chicago was the stage for the Great Fire of 1871, the Haymarket Riot and Bombing of 1886, the World's Fair of 1893, and the Pullman strike of the following year, there was very little time, incentive, or resources available to focus substantively on prison reform. This was partly due to the focus on the Chicago metropolitan area and the shift away from the rest of the rural-centered state. Federal funds and state budgets had to focus on the safety, and longevity, of Chicago; the city had become too important to the Midwestern economy. In fact, many states gave money to Chicago in the city's time of need.³⁴

The pre-Civil War debate for "best model of prison administration" did not reach the prisons of Illinois; instead, the prison philosophy and culture hovered on practical topics of facility operations and economic gains. The infamous Joliet prison did employ the silent system for their workers, but rehabilitation was not the reason for this mutual practice; instead, the silent treatment was utilized for financial reasons.³⁵ As earlier stated, the lease system ended in Illinois in 1866; the prison biennial reports show that contract knitting was a practiced arrangement in the women's sector of the prison.³⁶ It is unclear if this was public knowledge that would warrant

³⁴ Spinney, *City of Big Shoulders*, 107. Spinney writes that other several cities send money to Chicago to help rebuild after the fire. The entire city had burned down and capitalists feared a catastrophe with the economy. To help accelerate the rebuilding process, monetary donations were given.

³⁵ Dodge, "Women Convicts in Illinois Prisons, 1835-1896," 909. This is in reference to the original Joliet Prison, not the Women's Prison across the street that was opened in 1896.

³⁶ Dodge, *Whores and Thieves of the Worst Kind*, 46.

action in Chicago if progressive activists presently knew of the forced prisoner labor, or if they unknowingly bought inmate-made goods. Chicago historian L. Mara Dodge touched on the direction of reform campaigns in Illinois when she wrote,

[...] Chicago's women's club, the most active in the state, engaged in a broad range of criminal justice projects much closer to home than Joliet, fifty miles away. During the 1890s women reformers focused their energies on settlement housework; the establishment of the nation's first juvenile court; campaigns for hiring the female police officers; agitation against the 'white slave trade,' which allegedly trapped unsuspecting young women in lives of prostitution; and the improvement of the deplorable conditions that affected literally tens of thousands of women who were detained or incarcerated annually in Chicago's notorious police stations, county jail, and house of correction.³⁷

The direction of progressive women's reform campaigns was exponentially important when juxtaposing Indiana's reformatory efforts in the 1860s and 1870s that directly led to the opening of the Indiana Women's Prison (IWP).

The inception of the IWP was a response to the over-crowded city jails, the deplorable conditions of the co-ed prisons, and citywide campaigns to promote a productive Indianapolis. It is surprising when studying the timeline of the Indianapolis Women's Prison to note there were only 344 white settlers in the state of Indiana in 1820.³⁸ How then, fifty-three years later, did Indiana become the center of revolutionary prison sciences? Indiana was heavily influenced by, while also competing against, its bordering state Illinois, which propelled its own successes during the nineteenth century.

The central location of Indianapolis within the state of Indiana had a small but noticeable effect on the spread and adoption of prison reform ideology throughout the state. Different from Illinois, Indianapolis is the capital city while also boasting the largest population throughout the

³⁷ Ibid, 51.

³⁸ Justin E. Walsh, *The Centennial History of the Indiana General Assembly, 1816-1978* (Indianapolis, IN: The Indiana Historical Bureau, 1987), 28.

state. A popular misconception is that Chicago, rather than Springfield, is the capital of Illinois, solely from its cultural significance, population, and political draw. The chosen location of the IWP was in the heart of “Circle City,”³⁹ which would not have allowed the residents of Indianapolis’ East side to forget about the women behind the cement walls.⁴⁰

Penitentiaries were perceived to symbolize progressivism and the country’s movement toward modern thinking. Nineteenth-century historian Janet Miron, in her book, *Prisons, Asylums, and the Public*, delineates the importance of establishing penitentiaries near populated areas to promote the image of modern towns. She writes,

Rather than existing in isolation where inmates and patients were hidden from the outside world, nineteenth-century prisons and asylums were in some ways porous and permeable institutions characterized by complex and multilayered social interactions. Moreover, the interactions and exchanges that took place between these institutions and society and implications for employees, the public, and the institutionalized themselves.⁴¹

Not only was it important that citizens were informed about the congressional works of the city, they also needed knowledge of the penitentiary system to help advocate for inmates and their families as well as community members. In many ways, the public placement of the prison allowed a reciprocal relationship between the community and the laws, and the IWP came to shape and exemplify the typical nineteenth-century institution.

Even with municipal campaigns and individual acts of dedication to the social services and “downtrodden” people, it was not Illinois, but Indiana, that revered prison reform and changed the uniform look of incarceration in the United States. As the first original prison

³⁹ Circle City is the affectionate nickname of Indianapolis because of the way the main downtown streets meet around a Civil War monument roundabout.

⁴⁰ The Indianapolis Women’s Prison stayed in the original location until 2009, when it was moved to Speedway, IN, the location of the defunct Indianapolis Girls School. For 136 years, the maximum-security prison was in an urban neighborhood. Source: Indiana Department of Correction. *Facility History: Indianapolis Women’s Prison*. <http://www.in.gov/idoc/3075.html>.

⁴¹ Janet Miron, *Prisons, Asylums, and the Public: Institutional Visiting in the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 5.

philosophy outside of the East Coast that successfully campaigned for change, the Indiana reformatory model was able to come to fruition because of Indiana's booming economy, its smaller-scale political community, and as previously stated, the chosen location of the women's prison. These primary factors paved the way to the IWP and brought nationwide recognition to the state's "benevolent reformatory model."

Indiana's "pioneer period" began when the state had fewer than 100 permanent settler dwellings in the future capital four years after its acceptance into the Union.⁴² The state was built south to north, creating a lasting disparity between the regions. The southern half of the state could not keep pace with the northern manufacturing and farming because of the unruly, hilly topography of the region. Though the south did lead in political prowess, it was the upland southerners—emigrating from North Carolina and Virginia—who wrote the constitution in 1816. The cultural and physical bisection of the state was furthered with the continued practice of slaveholding in the south.⁴³

The Northwest Ordinance had prohibited the usage of slaves and indentured servitude in the new territories, but slavery was practiced in the Hoosier State by the French and even Governor William Henry Harrison himself.⁴⁴ Harrison tried to undo the banishment of slavery in the state, and even Western Indiana used a loophole in the state constitution to keep its slaves.⁴⁵ Anti-slavery agitation in Indiana increased during the 1820s, largely voiced by the Society of Friends, which forced many of the practicing slave-owners to flee to the new lands of Alabama and Mississippi. In fact, the Quakers in Wayne County, who founded coeducational Earlham

⁴² Walsh, *The Centennial History of the Indiana General Assembly, 1816-1978*, 20.

⁴³ Madison, James H, *Hoosiers: A New History of Indiana*

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 44.

⁴⁵ The northwest ordinance, and later the State Constitution used the words "hereafter made" causing Hoosiers to claim that there would be no more slaves in the state, but the ones already there could stay.

College in 1859, created a coalition to offer monetary assistance and support for free blacks.⁴⁶

Eastern Indiana boasted the largest population of Quakers and African Americans.

By 1850, there were ninety-one counties and a presence of 8,000 people in Indianapolis alone. Indiana had a series of setbacks when connecting different canals and transportation railways to compete with Ohio and Illinois, and like its bordering states, went bankrupt in 1836.⁴⁷ The state was able to settle its debts with foreign banks while also saving the Indianapolis and Madison railroad projects that were eventually completed in 1847.⁴⁸ Like Chicago, Indianapolis sprouted railway connections reaching all over the country and even received the nickname “Railroad City.”⁴⁹ The years after the Civil War were vital to the reformatory movement because of the industrial boom of the flour and grain mills, the lumberyards, and the silk mill in Indianapolis that congruently boosted the state population with a 159 percent increase.⁵⁰⁵¹ Even further, by 1900 Indiana was ranked eighth nationally as a major manufacturing hub.⁵² The increased presence of people in the city subsequently affected the prison and jail populations and forced state officials to tackle overpopulation and health code violations in the prisons.

According to the U.S. Census, the last time that Indiana had a higher population than Illinois was in 1830, and by 1860 Illinois had almost a million more people. Indianapolis has kept, and benefitted from, the “small-city” feel that most Midwestern cities boast, and in regards to prison reform, was exactly the factor that allowed the IWP to form. Two factors led to this

⁴⁶ Madison, *Hoosiers: A New History of Indiana*, 58.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 34. The Midwest, and many Southern states, suffered a sweep of bankruptcy from debt incurred by over-lending from European banks.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 37.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 145.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 146

⁵¹ Ruth Hutchinson Crocker, “The Settlement Movement in Two Industrial cities, 1889-1930,” *Social Work and Social Order* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 11.

⁵² Madison, *Hoosiers: A New History of Indiana*, 180.

successful campaign: Indiana's historic Bill of Rights, which outlined a reformatory penal code, and a "small government" that listened to its constituents, and saw both economic and moralistic benefits for a separate women's facility.⁵³ Furthermore, Indiana was home to the particularly influential Coffin family, whose members set out to change the overall look of prison facilities.

The Coffins began as a respectable Indiana Quaker family who resided in Richmond, Wayne County, east of Indianapolis, right on the Ohio border. Husband Charles and wife Rhoda were the epitome of Quaker royalty in Eastern Indiana. Born in 1826, Rhoda grew up with a strict Orthodox agenda, which stemmed from the influence of evangelical Christianity on her family. This was a huge deviation from standard Quaker practices that would later influence her own philosophies within the IWP.⁵⁴ Emboldened by the rise of nineteenth-century prison reform agendas, a traditional Quaker crusade, the Coffins were invited into several Indiana state prisons to spread the gospel. Horrified and shocked by the conditions of the Jeffersonville prison, the Coffins spoke to inmates about the abuses not only to the male population, but also the females. In her essay recalling the events before the inception of the IWP, Rhoda Coffin specifically mentioned the male inmates' petitions to help their fellow female inmates. It was the pleas from the male inmates, not the officials, nor the wardens, which stood as a turning point for Rhoda Coffin.⁵⁵ It was recorded in her essay that she was given information that led to the discovery of sexual abuse, as well as physical abuses, including public whippings, of the women prisoners. She wrote, "And then, after being careful that he would not be overheard, told me that a number

⁵³ Indiana, General Assembly, Indiana Historical Bureau, State Constitution, Article 1-Bill of Rights, Section 18, 1851.

⁵⁴Ellen D. Swain "From Benevolence to Reform: The Expanding Career of Mrs. Rhoda M. Coffin," (*Indiana Magazine of History*, Vol. 97, No. 3, September, 2001), 191. While evangelism is a sect of the religion, it was not historically an adopted practice, starting mainly in the Pacific Northwest. The first occurrence was in 1827 when Elias Hicks split the faith, and later regional differences would dictate Quaker practices. To read more of Quaker practices, refer to David Young's study, *How the Quakers Invented America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group, 2007).

⁵⁵Rhoda M. Coffin "Rhoda M. Coffin Essay, 14th, Feb 1902," (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana Historical Society), Collection SC# 3191, 1826-1909.

of the guards had keys to the women's prison and entered when they wished to gratify their lusts."⁵⁶ Additionally, it was brought to her attention that the guards invited their friends to the prison to watch the women bathe every Sabbath.⁵⁷

Before petitioning the help of Indiana Governor Conrad Baker, Charles Coffin had success lobbying Governor Oliver Morton, Baker's predecessor, for a boys' school in Indianapolis. The Coffins' successes influencing local government are significant for Indiana's history in a larger Midwestern context. Their success was the pinnacle in the national trend of religious organizations and government during the nineteenth century; a trend that would begin to decline during the latter half of the Progressive Era, and furthers the importance of studying key influencers in to piece together broader information in under researched sectors. In sum, the inauguration of the Indianapolis Women's Prison came at a crucial time in religious history before the divergence of social services and religion. Had it been even a decade later, it is uncertain whether the women's reformatory movement would have been able to create an original agenda, rather than conforming to established policies.

In her own words, Rhoda Coffin labeled Governor Baker as a pro-woman politician. It was in "full sympathy, and full confidence in the power of women" that led Baker to pass the correct legislation and subdue economic fears from the General Assembly.⁵⁸ Baker's continued efforts for the advancement of women in "Hoosier" society can be traced through several different laws passed during the 1870s; women were eligible for seats in the Indiana General Assembly, and in instances of divorce or mentally ill husbands, wives were entitled to real

⁵⁶ Ibid, 3.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 4. Rhoda makes sure to reference that the chaplain corroborated these accusations several times throughout the paper.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 4.

estate.⁵⁹ That final decision to “give the reins” to women officers was the differential factor of the Indiana reformatory movement from efforts before.

Additionally, it was decided that two women and one man would control the internal management of the prison, while only men would be the managers of building maintenance and finance divisions.⁶⁰ The IWP would also enact a new sentencing standard known as indeterminate sentencing that would give power to the Board of Managers on the length of an inmates stay at the prison.⁶¹ The final rules and regulations of the institution also included the new standards set by National Prison Administrators and Reformers at the 1870 Cincinnati caucus. It would be mandatory for reformatory institutions to provide educational, vocational, and recreational programs.⁶² For female reformatories, the educational opportunities provided would be domestic skills and labor.

The proposed bill passed and became law on May 13th, 1869, but the seventeen women prisoners from Jeffersonville were not brought into the structure until 1873. From the outside looking in, everything was perfect, and the initial goal of protecting the abused women through benevolent reform had been achieved; the experiment was over, and was now ingrained into Indianapolis’s criminal justice system. Unfortunately for the Indianapolis Women’s Prison, and the national reformatory movement, their good reputation would begin to tarnish within the first

⁵⁹ Walsh, *The Centennial History of the Indiana General Assembly*, 167.

⁶⁰ Coffin, “Rhoda M. Coffin Essay,” 4. Most radical women reformers were pushing agendas for complete female control in every aspect of the daily prison operations, but this decision to keep a male presence would have been in response to the fears and arguments against the movement from various state prison commissions and male correctional officers. In one instance, it was contended that female prisons were no different from the home, and that men and women needed to work together, with no mention that women would be hired in male institutions. To learn further about other state prison commission responses please refer to Estelle Freedman’s work, “Their Sister’s Keepers: An Historical Perspective on Female Correctional Institutions in the United States: 1870-1900,” *Feminist Studies* (Feminist Studies, Inc. Vol. 2, No 1, 1974), 77-95.

⁶¹ The 1892 Indiana Board of Charities wrote out the theory of indeterminate sentencing as “a person convicted of crime is simply sentenced to prison as a sick man is sent a hospital, the time of his discharge depending on how soon he is cured,” 43. Indiana did not implement this theory as a statewide policy, and there are several instances of Sarah Smith writing to the government about the lack of implementation.

⁶² Nicole Hahn Rafter, “Gender, Prisons, and Prison History,” *Social Science History* (Cambridge University Press, Vol. 9, No. 3 Summer 1985), 235.

few years. For prison experts and historians, this does not come as a surprise; many have come to believe that the only “positive” prison is no prison.⁶³ What unfolded in the first decade of the IWP is unknown to most contemporary prison historians; especially male-only institution focused scholarship, but has been brought to the attention of Indiana historians through a series of writings from contemporary inmates of the IWP.

The new information shows that there was documented abuse, implemented by the first superintendent, Sarah J. Smith, who was well known in Quaker circles, as well as the former Head Matron of the Home of the Friends.⁶⁴ A friend of Rhoda Coffin, Sarah held identical ideals and wishes for the reformatory, but contributed to the cyclical abuse the Coffins and other reformers wanted to stop. While the documented abuse in the IWP is a scandal that continues even today, the pertinent information about this situation comes from the written documentation from historians and feminist writers.

Without the knowledge of the physical abuse, a reader finding Coffin’s papers would think of Sarah Smith as an angel. It was written that she had the love and confidence of the prisoners,⁶⁵ and while that may have been a true experience for some of the women, it seems now tarnished from the accusations. Coffin wrote,

Take off her shackles” Mrs. Smith said, “She is my prisoner, not yours any longer.” They did so and as the shackles fell she took the prisoner in her arms, kissed her on the forehead and said, “O receive thee as a daughter;

⁶³ The Religious Society of Friends were the first proponents for prison abolition in England in the early inception of the religion. Today, the Quakers lead multiple campaigns such as Friends Committee on National Legislation and the Friends Service Committee to end mass incarceration in America. Prominent political figures like Angela Davis, Assata Shakur, and Ruth Gilmore have brought the Prison Industrial Complex into mainstream conversations. For a more informative study, refer to Maya Schenwar, *Locked Down, Locked Out: Why Prison Doesn’t Work and How We Can do Better* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2014).

⁶⁴ Michelle Jones, a former inmate of the Indianapolis Women’s Prison, who won the American Historical Association’s 2016 award, highlighted the documented abuses. Her story is documented through the September 13th, 2017, New York Times article Eli Hager, “From prison to Ph.D.: The Redemption and Rejection of Michelle Jones,” *The New York Times*. (New York, NY) September 13th, 2017. as well as Jones’ paper, “Failing the Fallen: Sexual and Gendered Violence on Incarcerated Women in the Gilded Age,” presented at the annual conference of the American Historical Association, Atlanta, GA, January 7th, 2016.

⁶⁵ Coffin, “Rhoda M. Coffin Essay,” 6.

let us pray and ask Heaven to help us,” and they both knelt with Mrs. Smith’s arms around her. She plead for power to bring the poor lost daughter home to God, and then rising with her prisoner still folded in her arms, she said, “come with me dear, I have the loveliest little room for thee”, and opening the door showed her new home for life. It was neatly furnished with an iron bedstead, a good luck mattress, a chair, little square table with a white muslin cover with a Bible and a hymn book on it, small looking glass, bed clothes in white, a small curtain over the window, a locker for her use and a pot of flowers in the window.⁶⁶

This narrative follows a common trend in primary documents that need to be corroborated, a common experience for any scholar. Coffin writes her own perception of the truth; she is not a historian, nor is she indebted to any prescribed set of writing rules. But the problem is found when countless writers, including biographers of the Coffin Family, do not address any form of the scandal, even though the inmates’ narrative of abuse was published in the local newspapers.⁶⁷ It seems that in secondary sources, a singular narrative of a basic prison known as the IWP was cyclically perpetuated.

The scandal happened in 1881, and soon both Sarah Smith and the Coffins were separated from the reformatory. The Coffins, also suffering a financial blowback, moved to Chicago in 1884 and never came back to Indiana.⁶⁸ Their legacy of benevolent work, along with the similar philosophy of the IWP, suffered from the scandal and undermined the reform movement itself as a whole. Granted, for women reformers of the Progressive Era, there were many opportunities to rejoice. The IWP served both as a penal facility and a correctional facility that offered resources for both women and girls. There were libraries, a musical room, a garden from which all the food served came, and a hospital. It has even been documented that women

⁶⁶ Coffin, “Rhoda M. Coffin Essay,” 6.

⁶⁷ Parts of Michelle Jones’ findings come from the *Indianapolis Journal*, a public archive that found one of the inmates died in the city while working as a domestic servant, and Smith herself physically attacked two other inmates. Smith was also alleged to have continuously dunked one inmate underwater until she lost consciousness.

⁶⁸ Swain, “From Benevolence to Reform: The Expanding Career of Mrs. Rhoda M. Coffin,” 190.

were allowed to have their babies with them in the IWP nurseries.⁶⁹ A reader of Indiana history, with the new knowledge of abuse allegations, would find it hard to read certain sources the same way. As one source wrote, “Discipline was mild, however. Inmates ‘lived in an atmosphere of tablecloths and china.’”⁷⁰ With the full knowledge of the abuses, it just does not read the same way. Modern critics have the hindsight to see the full legacy, and yet most have not documented the abuses.

In response to charges of negligence and abuse, the courts eventually cleared the institution of wrongdoing⁷¹; continuously through the scandal, the IWP was able to introduce Indiana society to reformatory theory, and cast prison reform as a positive for the whole welfare of the state. In the 1890 report from the Indiana Board of Charities, the document delineates a series of questions provided to the board and proposes answers.

If it be asked, why should reformation be the object of prison discipline? We answer, that reformation is but one phase of that protection, which it is necessary that the State secure to its citizens and to itself. Reformation is the most radical form of protection. It changes a criminal into a law-abiding, self-supporting citizen, a source of strength to the State, instead of a source of weakness.⁷²

Congruent with Progressive Era policies and ideals, the reformatory movement inspired several new organizations such as the Board of State Charities and Correction. From 1885 to 1935, the board superintended all the orphanages, state hospitals, prisons and correctional facilities, as well as the Indiana School of the Blind and the Indiana School for the Deaf. The board of charities was different from the Prison Board of Trustees, so there were several “watchdogs” overseeing

⁶⁹ Angela Davis, “Women and the Prison System,” *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 71.

⁷⁰ Bodenhamer, *The History of Indiana Law*, 106.

⁷¹ Indiana, General Assembly, Brevier Legislative Reports, Vol. XIX XX, Indiana Legislature in Senate, Thursday, February 24th, 1881 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Maurer School of Law), 219.

⁷² Annual Report of the Board of State Charities of Indiana, October 31st, 1890, *Hathi Trust Digital Library* (WM. B. Indianapolis, IN: Burford Publishing, 1890), 30.

the different prisons and reformatories in the state. These prison reform efforts were moving in positive trajectories throughout the Progressive Era, but the apex of the movement had already crested. By World War I, the new social reform goals stalled because of the national need for unanimity and increased patriotism, while a second wave of tumult was to come.

The downside to the women's reformatory movement, a sixty year "experiment," coincided with the Great Depression. The reformatory movement was, quite frankly, an expensive experiment. The reform and rehabilitative aspects of the institutions needed more officials and specialized workers and the structures were larger, more spacious, and demanded higher upkeep. After 1930, as the costs mounted and money could not be found, reformatories resettled into maximum security prisons and minor offenders were reassigned to other institutions, often back to the jails.⁷³ As other states tried to adopt reform models, many did not meet the requirements to fully be known as a reformatory, and many institutions relapsed back into their old punishing ways.⁷⁴ The turn of the twentieth century spelled the end of prison reform efforts.⁷⁵

Indiana's efforts have a long legacy, and it will continue be known as the state that had the first separate female institution. The story of the modest Quakers who fought against injustice may never fully change, but Indiana's prison history does not conclude with the decline of the reformatory movement. In accordance with greater national trends, Indiana saw the progression away from religious-based charities and reform efforts into the new era of scientific reasoning. Indiana moved into a scientific model after the rough beginnings of the IWP. The

⁷³ Rafter, "Gender, Prisons, and Prison History," 238.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 238.

⁷⁵ As will be shown in the next section, the prison reform movement in Indiana eroded when the first sterilization law was passed in 1907, closer to the turn of the century. Different from the prison reformatory movement that ended during the Great Depression, successful prison reform as a larger organized effort could not coincide with the new legislation.

“sisterly love” that drove the reformatory movement was no longer the legislative model to rehabilitation. Instead, a new movement known as Criminal Anthropology replaced it, ushering in the beginning of prison eugenics. Indiana would play a central role in this new movement as well.

Section Two

“Monsters vs. Fallen Angels” The Beginning of Criminal Anthropology and its History in American Prison Science 1900-1930

When dating the Progressive Era, historians tend to break up the decades by delineating certain movements that happened between 1880-1920; a few of the many things that happened during this “Gilded Age” were the temperance movement, the educational reform movement, and the beginning of the “melting pot” immigration movement. The prison reformatory movement is no different; it is broken up into two subcategories of 1870-1900 and 1900-1930. Woven into all of these separate movements was a push from progressives to find better scientific reasoning and new hypotheses to understand the world around them. As noted in the earlier section, this era started a trajectory that favored scientific methods. This trend is apparent not only in American timelines but also as a global phenomenon. Much as in the original Scientific Revolution of the 1500s, the push for new scientific data in the social sciences and services ran parallel with efforts by religious thinkers; it was not the end of organized religion, but simply a convergence of multiple thinkers and reform visions.

On the surface, there is little difference between the prison reformers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Similar attempts to change efforts through legislation are found. Continued worries of abuse allegations and protections for inmates are apparent in both centuries, and even the prison facilities are comparable. It is especially apparent when incarceration trends show the same demographics of people occupying similar prisons regardless of time. But slowly, after examination of the diverging centuries, the distinction between the reformers grows when the sources of crime are researched and new leaders emerge with political agendas.

For the prison reformers of the nineteenth century, a new description of their work could have been defined as “criminal management.”⁷⁶ One of the main focuses of their work was the reform of the physical structure of correctional facilities; separate wings, cottage models, and reorganized cells, especially for the women’s departments. Another facet of their work was to reach out more broadly to society by opening juvenile departments, the beginning frameworks of modern parole boards, and statewide probation systems. As professor David J. Rothman summed up in his book cited here, these new reform tactics opened up a higher organizational system to make reform in the physical prison more successful.⁷⁷ In essence, many of the policies put in place in the late 1800s are still common practice in modern American society.

The work to build up social services was tremendously successful during this era. It was a multi-organization and interreligious effort. The homogenous ethnic groups of the Midwest region influenced this trend of interpersonal cooperation between networks and departments. German immigrants were the largest conglomeration of ethnic minorities between Illinois and Indiana, further solidifying the bordering states’ likenesses in ethnic population. Specifically, Chicago had a large Polish presence, while Indianapolis’ second largest group was the Irish.^{78,79} The Midwest, looked at from above, resembles a checkerboard that parallels the homogenous migratory patterns. For economists, these immigration models happen because relocating near familial locations brings higher economic prosperity, and alleviates transitional psychological wear.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ A term coined by writer Eleanor Conlin Casella in her book, *The Archaeology of Institutional Confinement* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007), 1.

⁷⁷ David J. Rothman, *Conscience and Convenience: The Asylum and its Alternatives in Progressive America* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2002).

⁷⁸ Chicago has for many decades boasted the largest Polish presence outside of Warsaw.

⁷⁹ Crocker, *Social Work and Social Order*, 14. Crocker breaks up the percentages in her book. She found that in 1920, 44 percent of Indianapolis was German, and 20 percent were Irish.

⁸⁰ McDonald, *Chicago: An Economic History*, 8.

Progressives worked hard to make every step of the way easier for immigrant families to assimilate into what they believed were appropriate ways of living; they taught English, secured safe and affordable housing, promoted democracy and other facets of American life.⁸¹ Data shows that many new immigrants quickly found their way into state prisons and asylums across the Midwest. The populations of penitentiaries showed that foreign-born or second-generational immigrants made up over fifty percent of inmate demographics.⁸² Specifically, in 1880, immigrants accounted for twenty five percent of the prison population.⁸³ This trend applies itself to all genders and races; immigrant women, as well as women of color, are proportionately incarcerated more than their “Americanized” counterparts. It seems that the progressives’ mission of helping immigrants in the streets of their respective cities did not extend past prison gates and their efforts were not wide-sweeping enough to keep them out of the prison. (And their efforts contributed to policing and criminalization, some have argued).

Through the reformatory movement, these private prisons were able to pick and choose who would be capable of not only transferring to the reformatory, but also who was capable of being reformed. Different from the state penitentiaries and prisons, fewer immigrants and women of color were sentenced or relocated to the reformatories. The Indianapolis Women’s Prison participated in these subjective acceptances by taking minor offenders in the early years: women who were violating public order through public intoxication, indecency, larceny, and other petty crimes.⁸⁴ After the turn of the century, there was an increase of assault and battery charges, as

⁸¹ Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Who Were the Progressives?* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillian, 2002), 8.

⁸² Rothman, *Conscience and Convenience*, 24.

⁸³ Larry E. Sullivan, *The Prison Reform Movement: Forlorn Hope* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1990), 21.

⁸⁴ Rafter, “Gender, Prisons, and Prison History,” 237. The numbers do not support many women committed violent offenses. Of course, there are some exceptions and the media have definitely profiled those women prolifically. But the reformatory movement was not for “hardened criminals.” Officials wanted to keep separate the “seasoned criminals” from minor offenders so that the women in the reformatories were not subject to foul play or bad influences. However, the IWP did eventually become a maximum-security prison around the 1940s and housed some of Indianapolis’ most notorious criminals.

well as increased occupancy recording of prostitutes.⁸⁵ The Indiana Board of Charities' annual report of 1920 did acknowledge the new classification of women inmates coming into the Women's Prison. Initially, it was noted that fewer women were being admitted into the institution and further, that the "quality" of inmates had changed.⁸⁶

Scholars and feminist writers of today continue to question the intended purpose of reformatories: whom were the reformatories for? As the data demonstrates, they were not for women of color, and they were not for immigrants. There was a belief that some women were not suitable for the reformatories, and Sarah Smith recorded that she herself forced women to leave.⁸⁷ Herein lies the unstated force of the reformatory movement: readjusting Euro-American women's paths to include domestic benefits i.e. marriage, servitude, and above all, a standard of morals to which white women were expected to adhere.⁸⁸

In order to understand the compulsion of prison reformers to inculcate their charges with Victorian ideals on womanhood, researchers must look back to 1817 and examine the thinking of Elizabeth Fry, an English Quaker woman who pioneered the modern woman's reformatory movement. As a reformer, and also as an early candidate to be labeled a prison scientist, Fry wrote about women of the prison as "sisters"⁸⁹ and called for a classificatory system that separated women by age, sentence, and perceived conduct.⁹⁰ The Indianapolis reformatory

⁸⁵ Both the 1909 and the 1910 Annual Reports show new subcategories of commitments. Report of the Board of Trustees, September 20th, 1909, Annual Report of the Board of Trustees for the Indianapolis Women's Prison Manuscripts, Indianapolis Historical Society, Indianapolis, IN. Annual It is unclear if the women were self-reporting as prostitutes, or if the courts were deeming the women with the title. Further, the definition of prostitution varied greatly during the Progressive Era and often meant women who had sexual relations outside of marriage. This is another layer of complication when studying intake records.

⁸⁶ Annual Report of the Board of State Charities of Indiana, September 30, 1920, *Hathi Trust Digital Library* (Fort Wayne, IN: Fort Wayne Printing Company, 1921), 24.

⁸⁷ Jones, "Failing the Fallen." Jones found in Smith's personal diaries that she had deemed the IWP unsuitable, and sent these inmates back to the jails.

⁸⁸ Gottschalk, *The Prison and the Gallows: Politics of Mass Incarceration in America*, 117.

⁸⁹ Freedman, "Their Sisters' Keepers," 80.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 80. Elizabeth Fry wrote these considerations and claims in her book, *Observations on the visiting, superintendence and government, of female prisoners* (London, UK: J. and A. Arch, 1837).

readily and enthusiastically followed Fry's recommendations for women's institutions, and often spoke of the incarcerated women as sisters or family,⁹¹ which further complicated the treatment of these women. A common vernacular for slaveholders was to label themselves as fathers and mothers to justify punishment. The dialect of prison subordination infantilized men and women through those same patterns.

The philosophy of "fallen" daughters and sisters worked well in nineteenth century campaigns against certain vices and prostitution in the city, known historically as "white slavery," which reflects the gendered and racialized conceptions of morality and public work for women. In fact, the updated lexicon is echoed for decades in prison officials' circles, reform committees, and local and state governments. Much like the canonical story of Adam and Eve, an indecent woman incarcerated for the same crime as her male counterparts was deemed to have fallen more considerably from grace. Most commonly, a woman was jailed for prostitution while the male involved was only given a fine.⁹² Reformatories were able to take away the jail time, and help these "fallen women." But by the twentieth century this descriptive language had changed, and they were "sisters" no more.

Elizabeth Fry would have been a figure taught about in the Coffin family household as a heralded Quaker. Much like Fry, Rhoda Coffin had a religious drive to help the women in the Indiana penitentiaries, although she was only a concerned citizen and not a trained professional in the field. She was able to teach what she knew about domesticity through her own experiences, but she was not a doctor or a scientist. As the Progressive Era continued into the twentieth century, scientific recommendations took precedence over non-scientific approaches to

⁹¹ Thirty-Seventh Annual Correctional Department Report, Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Indiana Woman's Prison, September 30th, 1907, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, IN.

⁹² Freedman, "Their Sister's Keepers," 85.

reform. Chicago prison historian L. Mara Dodge summarized the progression of the new thought processes for women's prison ideology.

Although domesticity and the inculcation of norms of proper femininity remained central components, the medical model became critical to Progressive Era ideology and rehabilitation programs for female offenders. This emerging medical model embodied a faith in scientific classification, psychiatric diagnosis, intelligence testing, and eugenics doctrines.⁹³

This was not just a Midwestern trend, nor was it solely an American trend; the Western world was embroiled with questions about the causes of crime, how to prevent crime, and what to do with criminals. A pivotal moment in prison sciences happened in the 1880s when Alphonse Bertillon's classification system of fingerprinting, mug shots, and anthropometry standards for intake and processing changed France's criminal records astronomically.⁹⁴ Soon, American police forces, jails, and prisons adopted the system.⁹⁵

Congruently, an Italian professor would become the first criminologist of the kind when Cesare Lombroso published *Criminal Man (L'uomo delinquente)* in 1876. His follow-up work, *Criminal Woman (La donna delinquente)*, published in 1893, claimed that women criminals were a new human subspecies.⁹⁶ His experiments were the first formal work done in the new discipline of Criminal Anthropology, and his conclusions certainly did not align with the women's vernacular of "wayward sisters" used by reformers like Rhoda Coffin and Elizabeth

⁹³ Dodge, *Whores and Thieves*, 19.

⁹⁴ Simon A. Cole, *Suspect Identities: A History of Fingerprinting and Criminal Identification* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009). Bertillon's system was first implemented in the Joliet State Prison in Illinois in 1887, but by 1903 it was used all through the country. It is still the basis of how current courts of law uphold biological evidence.

⁹⁵ It was actually the 1870 convention in Cincinnati, the same convention that the IWP was created from, that touted classification system as the premiere system for encouraging prisoners to reform. It took seventeen years to achieve unification of this system.

⁹⁶ Lombroso's assertion that criminal women were a new subspecies was based on his beliefs that these women were actual monsters. "The born female criminal is, so to speak, doubly exceptional, first as a woman and then as a criminal. This is because criminals are exceptions among civilized people, and women are exceptions among criminals... As a double exception, then, the criminal woman is a true monster" Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrer. Trans. Nicole Hahn Rafter and Mary Gibson, *Criminal Women, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 8.

Fry before her. Based on his observations of the women he studied at the University of Turin, Lombroso argued that women criminals were “big children,” “more masculine than normal women,” and “plainly inferior.”⁹⁷ In fact, he even surmised that prostitutes had more pubic hair, bigger calves, and more developed clitorises compared to non-criminal women.⁹⁸ Part of his findings came from his experience and support of cranial anthropometry, much like Alphonse Bertillon’s work.

The American responses to Lombroso’s work ranged from acceptance to pure dismissal to outrage by some prison wardens. Lombroso fell into the common dichotomy of nature versus nurture; it is not apparent if he believed that poverty, educational disadvantages, and location played a role in increasing crime. In his mind, criminal women were subjected to biological determinism, so how would reform help? Lombroso addressed that Italy had social inequalities, but contradicts himself several times in his findings, and unfortunately, sometime after his works reached America, he died before any clarification could be questioned of him.⁹⁹

Lombroso’s hope to find a biological reason for crime was not the sole work of its kind regionally, or even internationally. For twentieth-century American prison scientists whose theories echoed inherent criminal behavior in human biology, there were major efforts to promote nativist, xenophobic, and racist dialogue by attributing the reason for rising crime rates to immigrants and lower socioeconomic communities.¹⁰⁰ While Criminal Anthropology did not pervade mainstream prison sciences in America, criminology as a discipline did arise after 1930. And since their creation, the academic disciplines of sociology and criminology have largely

⁹⁷ Cesare Lombroso, Trans. Nicole Hahn Rafter and Mary Gibson. *Criminal Women, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman*, 1, 8.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 123.

⁹⁹ Mary Gibson, *Born to Crime: Cesare Lombroso and the Origins of Biological Criminology* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 3.

¹⁰⁰ Pisciotta. *Benevolent Repression*, 126.

produced scholarship on historical prison theory. Regardless of Lombroso's own triumphs or failures in the academic prison sciences, variations of his eugenics-influenced work popped up in prisons nation-wide, most notably in Indiana.

Eugenics has a multilayered and ever-changing definition that does not allow singular classification because it evolves when placed in certain contexts. Specifically, the usage of eugenics in the context of World War II evokes emotional responses and brings new cultural meaning to the word. Eugenics has a knee-jerk association to the German Nazis but its roots are in the first sterilization laws enacted thirty years earlier in Indiana.¹⁰¹ The definition of eugenics through sterilization is further complicated and explored even within Hoosier circles, as some believed it helped alleviate the large number of state-dependent mothers and children, while for others "it meant encouraging the most prosperous and successful to multiply, while impeding the replication of the deviant, the disabled, the diseased, or the criminal."¹⁰² Sterilization was certainly a draconian response to America's crime debates.

By the nineteenth century, early eugenics came to fruition through the degeneracy theory, and the fear that a certain population of society was on the decline.¹⁰³ Instead of continuing to fund and combat lengthy Progressive Era agendas such as modern sanitary acts, leaders advocated sterilization as a corrective solution. Indiana was the first American state to have a sterilization law, pioneered by Dr. Harry Clay Sharp in 1907. The driving ideas behind the movement were rooted in the Contagious Diseases Acts and the English Poor Laws that targeted

¹⁰¹ Paul A Lombardo, *A Century of Eugenics in America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), 1.

¹⁰² Ibid, 7.

¹⁰³Elof Axel Carlson, "The Hoosier Connection: Compulsory Sterilization as Moral Hygiene," *A Century of Eugenics in America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), 14. The role and dictation of science increased in western society around the 1600s. The responsibility to help the poor was first placed in the hands of church officials and patronages, but during the Reformation, the state had the responsibility to be in charge of social services. After the Reformation, England participated in deporting its criminals and poorer citizens to the New World Colonies or Australia

inmates who were “feeble-minded,” “mentally ill,” or even “epileptics.”¹⁰⁴ With Indiana possessing the highest illiteracy rate of any northern state, many citizens were susceptible to the “feeble-minded” label.¹⁰⁵

Employed in the Jeffersonville Prison, the same prison that Rhoda Coffin examined decades earlier, Clay disclosed over 450 compulsory sterilizations on male inmates from 1899 to 1909.¹⁰⁶ Working before the first law, Clay is suspected to have performed over 600 procedures. During the legal years of the bill, eugenics historians have an easier time recording the sterilization process of the era through laws, deeds, and physician’s notes. As a proponent for eugenic surgery, Clay had several friends in legislation and high Indiana society to help him pass the first version of the bill. In fact, Amos Butler, the founder of Butler University in Indianapolis, was a vocal proponent in eugenic theory during his tenure as the new secretary of the Indiana Board of Charities in 1916.¹⁰⁷¹⁰⁸

Indiana’s ability to pass eugenic sterilization legislation gave other states, as well as federal level jurisdictions, the confidence to advocate for their own laws. By 1921, California doctors had performed a record of 2,248 sterilizations, the highest number nationwide.¹⁰⁹ Concurrently, eugenicists everywhere celebrated the outcomes of two federal cases. Led by a Midwesterner, Harry Laughlin, the Federal Immigration Restriction Act of 1924 was enacted by

¹⁰⁴ Lombardo, *A Century of Eugenics*, 3.

¹⁰⁵ Madison, *Hoosiers: A New History of Indiana*, 202.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 20.

¹⁰⁷ Jason S. Lantzer, “The Indiana Way of Eugenics Sterilization Laws, 1907-1974” *A Century of Eugenics in America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), 27.

¹⁰⁸ Twenty-Seventh Annual Report, December 26, 1916, Board of State Charities of Indiana, *Hathi Digital Library* (Fort Wayne, IN: Fort Wayne Printing Co, 1917), 29.

¹⁰⁹ Alexandra Minna Stern, “From Legislation to Lived Experience: Eugenic Sterilization in California and Indiana, 1907-1979, *A Century of Eugenics in America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), 100. Stern writes that California performed 80 percent of sterilization cases.

President Calvin Coolidge.¹¹⁰ During the same decade, the Supreme Court heard the case for forced sterilization of mentally handicapped citizens in 1927. In the infamous case *Buck vs. Bell*, the lasting words from the case, uttered by Associate Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, “three generations of imbeciles is enough,” summed up the use of eugenic theory in the criminal justice system.¹¹¹

While the eugenic movement had momentum for a few decades, the formal use of eugenic theory was eventually overturned. By 1965, the Federal Immigration Restriction was repealed by the Immigration and Nationality Act.¹¹² For Indiana, the initial sterilization law of 1907 was overturned and readjusted in 1927; this version of the bill continued until 1974. It seems that the long-lasting imagery of the Holocaust pushed mainstream eugenicists to back away from aggressive legislation, but in places where that knowledge was tucked away in complicated legislation, there was little outcry against the movement.

The Indianapolis Women’s Prison did not have a particularly colorful physician report in their annual reports. Uniformly, the information provided mainly consisted of how many women were infected with gonorrhea, syphilis, and other sexually transmitted infections. Each physician’s report shows a routine of blood drawings, physical and bacterial exams, and if necessary, injections of Salvarsan in the 1910s for newly admitted women.¹¹³ On the other hand, the records show an increase of mental health categories from “invalid,” “feeble-minded,” “lunatic,” and even “psychopath.” No reported cases of forced sterilization in the IWP appear on record, but that does not mean it did not happen. In fact, as Lucia Zedner has found in her work,

¹¹⁰Paul A. Lombardo, “Medicine, Eugenics, and the Supreme Court: From Coercive Sterilization to Reproductive Freedom,” *Journal of Contemporary Health Law and Policy*, (Vol 13, No. 1, Article 5 1997), 5.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 11.

¹¹² Ibid, 6.

¹¹³ Salvarsan was the first organic antidote against syphilis, a constant plague on society; the salvarsan injection was extremely painful.

placing women in reformatories through indeterminate sentencing actually was a form of eugenics because it took women out of society during their most fertile years.¹¹⁴

Forced sterilization would not have been proposed for all inmates. As previously stated, Dr. Sharp recommended certain types of inmates for the forced vasectomy procedure. In contextualizing of the IWP, most institutionalized women would have been involved with more minor offences, not mental health instances, though when researchers study the racial differences between white women and women of color, they find a significant discrepancy. While both women of color and white women may have been labeled insane, only white women were removed to the newly erected asylums.¹¹⁵ Traditionally, hysteria and insanity were gendered as women's diseases, but affluent white women who were institutionalized would not have warranted a penitentiary location.¹¹⁶ This era increased reasons for imprisonment, while also increasing designated spaces to hold these new "felons."

Creating suitable mental health institutions for mental health patients was one of the heralded advancements during the Progressive Era; asylums and hospitals helped alleviate overcrowding in the prisons where unsuitable officials were in charge. While these hospitals and asylums were not immune to scrutiny and scandals, it changed the look of uniform institutions. With advancements and increases of these public social services, there were assumptions that the number of carceral institutions would decrease. The opposite was proven to be true, and little effort was expended on providing alternatives to institutionalism.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Lucia Zedner. "Wayward Sisters: The Prison for Women" in *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society*, eds. Norval Morris and David J. Rothman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹¹⁵ Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, 67.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 67.

¹¹⁷ Rafter, "Gender, Prisons, and Prison History," 234. Nicole Rafter delineates the increase of open institutions in a time when crime was low, and reform efforts were high. In 1900-1935, girls schools and women's prisons were opening in rapid succession.

During a span of sixty years, Indiana was at the forefront of experimental prison theories and prison sciences, proving the region's worth for academic attention. What were the chances that the agricultural Midwestern states would pave the way for modern incarceration trends? As shown, there was little disparity between the nineteenth century's "benevolent" forces of the IWP and the twentieth century's eugenics theory, though neither experiment was able to stay mainstream. The reintroduction of domestic duties and the ideals of Victorian womanhood did not pervade the prison during the twentieth century because of the advancement of the "new woman" in American culture. And the subsequent repercussions of World War II inspired legislative acts to thwart eugenicists.

Section Three

“A New Penology:” The Promotion of the History of the American Midwest and Progressive Era Prison Scholarship in Current Academia¹¹⁸

Since the campaign to reform prisons of the Progressive Era, modern day reformers have failed to reorganize and reform the prison of the twentieth and twenty-first century. The neglect of widespread change in current prison activism is partly a result of the complacency within mainstream academia. It is every American’s civic duty to be informed about the prison system, but lack of support from scholars and writers perpetuates ignorance about the people who occupy the prisons and the institution itself. There is need for real reform in today’s world, and a renaissance of scholarship, including an emphasis for more experimentation and involvement with the prison system taken from the Progressive Era, could lead to “a new penology” movement.

Promoting prison history in current academia can be achieved by following simple recommendations about the reprioritization of currently produced scholarship. The Midwestern region must be acknowledged for its insurmountable efforts in national prison reform, and especially the new examination of the Indianapolis Women’s Prison. Progressive Era historians must recognize prison reformers and the reformatory movement as an added social service of the era, one that mirrored many of the limitations and hierarchies of other Progressive visions. Additionally, women’s institutions and reform efforts need to be included in prison history overviews. Finally, perspectives and analyses from actual inmates need to be highlighted in formal academia.

¹¹⁸ This term was used by Alexander Pisciotto in his book, *Benevolent Repression: Social Control and Social Order*, to present Zebulon Brockway’s prison model in New York.

The topic of prison history follows the same layering of information that Tocqueville writes about in his assessment of the American executive powers. Where there are city, county, state, and federal laws, the prison has its own breakdown of power and operations. Therefore the history of the prison follows meticulous differentiations of the system. There are histories of jails, prisons, and penitentiaries or more specifically county, state, and federal prisons. There are juxtapositions of the American system vs. international interpretations of disciplinary institutions. Furthermore, there are overarching narratives of the American prison system as a whole versus case studies of specific prisons and even the complications of gender differentiations. The historiography of prison scholarship is a complicated order, and this paper's case study shows the need for continued exploration of the topic, especially regarding women's incarceration trends in modern America.

Conducting the history of American prisons involves research and consideration of several academic disciplines about the criminal system at large. Understanding the history of criminology, the psyche of inmates, and the sociological subculture of the prison complicates comparisons of writers and scholarship, as well as the whole genre. It is hard to compare different prison writers when the content of their work relies on variant rules in accordance to their discipline or topic; for historians, the differences between analyzing the prison from the past to the present or the present to the past greatly changes the perspectives of timeline progression and the production and dissemination of knowledge. There are no set rules on which analytical perspective is standard.

Since the inception of modern criminology, the disciplines of sociology and psychology have largely "claimed" the prison as their domain. While historians have written about the prison system in historic America, very few have done deliberate case studies on the Progressive Era

prisons, and fewer have engaged personally with criminal women. For this study especially, the Midwest has been largely taken out of the larger conversation of prison historiography because of the rich prostitution history of the “Wild West” and the colonial setting of the Eastern gallows. More specifically, Indiana is typically allocated a paragraph or two in each scholarly work. While there have been several doctoral studies and thesis done from Indiana University and Ball State University about Indiana’s prison history, little mainstream scholarship beyond regional academic circles has been concentrated on the Indianapolis Women’s Prison itself.¹¹⁹ This dearth of scholarship reflects the larger conversation about the lack of Midwestern representation of women --especially women of color-- institutions, and social accomplishments in academia that engages with prison studies.

Largely, the focus of Midwestern efforts in American history centers on Chicago, not even the state of Illinois, and passes over the rest of the region. Often labeled as “fly-over territory,” the Midwest as a region is a crucial part of the equation in understanding the psyche of the American prison and the criminal justice system as a whole. Similar to prisoners, the Midwest is often seen as a “third-class citizen” behind the coastal regions, and with the lack of representation in prison theory, perspectives on immigration, economic complexities, and distinct cultures of the Progressive Era are forgotten. Even historians of the region miss key information that can change the narrative of Midwestern scholarship. Indiana historian James H. Madison generalizes the Hoosier state when he writes “[h]oosiers came to seek the comforts of predictability rather than the risks of change. They became a people more eager for slow and

¹¹⁹ Examples of useful projects from Indiana Institutions include Perry Clark’s “Barred Progress: Indiana Prison Reform, 1880-1920” MA Thesis, Indiana University, Bloomington, 2008 and James Carey’s dissertation “A History of the Indiana Penitentiary System, 1821-1933” PhD Diss., Ball State University, Muncie, 1996 which both delineate the history of Indiana’s male prisons, not female institutions.

gradual change, even continuity.”¹²⁰ Hence, if a prison writer skips over the women’s reformatory movement of Indiana, then his or her scholarship is simply incomplete. The reformatory movement was the culmination of Midwestern political efforts and familial values; it did not just appear at random. Regional historians of the Midwest have found that the settlers of the “Old Northwest” were engulfed in political change and were highly motivated in democratic lobbying efforts in their local governments.¹²¹ While many of the new settlers had come from old America of the East, the new frontier showed appealing measures of new governing and development that gave the region its own autonomy.¹²² The Midwest was not a replica of the East Coast; the first policy makers could not, and did not want to simply replicate old legislations and policies.

Another factor in the Midwestern success of the reformatory movement came from the migration patterns of Quakers during the early nineteenth-century. Frustrated with the spread of slavery in the Mid-Atlantic region of the country, many communities found solace in the Whitewater valley region of Indiana.¹²³ The migration brought roughly 6,000 people to the new territory, and the Quakers were the most prominent.¹²⁴ The Quakers brought with them their abolitionist fervor, their activism, and their passion for justice, and they had a large impact on Indiana’s constitution and governing philosophy. Through traditional Quaker stances on prison reform and inmate advocacy, these stances were ingrained into the ethos of Indiana identities.

¹²⁰ Madison, *Hoosiers: A New History of Indiana*, 191.

¹²¹ Andrew R. L. Cayton and Peter S. Onuf. *The Midwest and the Nation: Rethinking the History of an American Region* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), XIX.

¹²² *Ibid*, XV.

¹²³ John Barnhart, *Valley of Democracy: The Frontier Versus the Plantation in the Ohio Valley, 1775-1818*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1953), 164.

¹²⁴ Chelsea L. Lawlis, “Migration to the Whitewater Valley, 1820-1830,” *Indiana Magazine of History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University History Department, Vol. 43, No. 3, 1947), 225. This article shows the importance of Quaker Migration in Indiana. Lawlis was able to find evidence that prominent Indiana Quaker, Levi Coffin, relative of the Charles and Rhoda Coffin family, was one of the migrants during this time. Coffin was famous for his efforts in the Underground Railroad, and was known as the “Unofficial President of the Underground Railroad.”

As Indiana has solidified its historical legacy in prison reform efforts through the reformatory movement, other Midwestern cities have rich prison histories that further prove the region's worth in prison academia. In 1846, for example, Michigan was the first Midwestern state to abolish capital punishment,¹²⁵ and later, in 1869, the state was the first to enact indeterminate sentencing for female prostitutes.¹²⁶ Also, Missouri's state prison located in Jefferson City, during World War I, was instrumental in housing famous female political prisoners who were indicted on charges of espionage and sedition and were in conjunction with fellow Midwestern Socialist Eugene V. Debs.¹²⁷ No longer can the Midwest be labeled as "fly-over territory;" no longer should prisoners be labeled as "third-class citizens."

By promoting regional prison differences, Midwestern historians could eradicate harmful generalities of prison literature and scholarship. It is important for writers to indicate the prison history and experiences of each distinct American region to wholly represent the system. Inmate experiences differ with each penitentiary, time period, and state; it is time to stop the continuation of a bi-coastal study of prisons, and develop more regionally centered histories. If this is successful, prison history will be able to penetrate more historical narratives for greater usage in other disciplines and scholarship.

The Progressive Era arguably represents the largest cluster of social change in the New World. It is particularly important when researching the era not to convolute the progressives with today's definition of progressivism; many of the platforms the progressives revered, i.e., indeterminate sentencing and antiquated definitions of societal women, would not be positive in

¹²⁵ McKelvey, *American Prisons*, 49.

¹²⁶ Gottschalk, *The Prison and the Gallows*, 117.

¹²⁷ The Missouri State Penitentiary contracted many out of state inmates to fill their women's ward. Infamous Anarchist Emma Goldman, and Socialist Kate Richards O'Hare were simultaneously imprisoned in the MSP. To read more about their incarceration, please refer to Goldman's book, *Living My Life*. (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1931) and O'Hare's *In Prison*. (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1923).

modern society. Instead, it is beneficial to emphasize these historical figures as activists who disrupted government complacency during their lifetimes. Government, they believed, should benefit the people and enhance social change within its own societies. With so many different social movements clashing and intersecting with each other, many movements, and even state participation, got lost in the chaos.

Scholars have pushed to emphasize the actions of female actors in Progressive Era efforts to balance uneven narratives. This has been a successful movement in academia, and the same campaign needs to be proclaimed for the women's prison movement. Progressive Era writers have the ability to help promote this development because of the women's reformatory movement. Often, prison reformers are not included in works about progressives, even though they fall under the same time period, regions, and qualifications to merit the title. To answer Glenda Gilmore's book title, *Who Were the Progressives?*, a mere inclination that many were prison reformers and inmate advocates would be a start. It is not necessarily that Progressive Era writers do not ever acknowledge prison reformers in their examinations of the era, but more to the fact that the activists were embroiled in several social programs as a result of the politically charged and organized times, and prison reform is rarely addressed. More middle-class and upper-class women joining reform movements meant that more outreach services could be covered, which paradoxically had the effect of making one particular cause lose its potency. Even though it is difficult to delineate every social movement the reformers were involved in, the prison reformatory efforts should be included in progressive scholarship; without this inclusion, the reformatory movement is lost in the cross hairs of interdisciplinary work.

The quest for inclusive writing does not stop with the adoption of historical players in prison efforts in the Progressive Era; it needs to address larger writing trends in the discipline of

history itself. For example, historian Blake McKelvey is celebrated as the premiere prison historian in the field even after his death in 2000. His groundbreaking monograph, *American Prisons*, was published in 1972 and was a continuation of his thesis from 1933. His work is a great overview of the history of America's relationship to the prison system, but there is not one chapter devoted to female institutions. Most prison scholarship is by male writers about male institutions, and this has been justified using the argument that there have been more male prisoners in history.¹²⁸

The absence of research centered on gender imbalances in the prison further promotes the marginalization of women inmates as well as women reformers and creators of prisons and reformatories. The prison system negatively affects both genders and population trends should not determine importance of reform or justification of scholarship. As previously shown in this paper, the women's reformatory movement would never have happened if reform efforts were determinate of population or more populous demographics. The lack of inclusion of the female reformatory movement in prison history scholarship is further shown in the book, *Benevolent Repression* by Alexander Pisciotta. Published in 1994, the book describes the infamous Elmira Prison in New York and the institutions' transformation from a male penitentiary to a reformatory. The transition was led by Progressive Era penologist Zebulon Brockway, a proponent for both science and medicine to lead rehabilitative measures.¹²⁹ Pisciotta quickly promotes a negative viewpoint of the reformatory movement, and addresses the movement as a terrible system. In his condemnation of the movement, he makes not one reference to the Indianapolis Women's Prison, even though he chronicles the 1870 Cincinnati symposium where

¹²⁸ This idea was the inception of Nicole Hahn Rafter's expansive writings. She narrates these arguments in her article, "Gender, Prisons, and Prison History".

¹²⁹ Pisciotta, *Benevolent Repression*, 2. Brockway was a leader in the push to expand indeterminate sentencing throughout the country as the premiere rehabilitative measure.

the IWP was conceived. Moreover, he labels the opening of the Elmira Reformatory as “the world’s first reformatory-prison,”¹³⁰ although it was opened three years after the IWP.¹³¹ However much this study agrees with Pisciotta’s assertion that historians have not fully researched the “in between institutions” in modern carceral studies and the reformatory system has been ignored, his failure to show a gendered analysis of the prison movement additionally widens the gap of complete narratives.¹³² While he does cite Midwestern examples, like the Indiana Reformatory for men that was opened in 1897, he makes no mention that the women’s reformatory, already founded in the state, would have influenced the induction of the male institution. By focusing on only one half of the country’s population, Pisciotta fails in his own argument by not researching the full movement.¹³³

In conjunction with psychology and criminology, the discipline of gender, women, and sexual studies has largely increased the current scholarship of modern prison studies since 1980. This writing trend has created new perspectives on the topic that often are the first of its kind for the field. What many gender studies writers have tried to focus on is the interpersonal relationships of incarceration, not the system as a whole. By highlighting individual women in the prison system, gender studies writers have used the women’s contextualized experiences to help promote close examinations on the effects of incarceration. Often, these prison writers live

¹³⁰ Ibid, 2.

¹³¹ Ibid, 2. The Elmira Reformatory was opened in 1876, though the building was not finished until 1880. The IWP was opened in 1873. Moreover, in 1888 Elmira adopted the military system and had to pay for their room, board, education, and medical procedures.

¹³² Ibid, 3.

¹³³ Ibid, 4. Pisciotta writes, “The failure of historians to examine critically the adult reformatory movement leaves a significant gap in our understanding of the history of American corrections and social control.” But by not addressing the other reformatory movements of the country, Pisciotta brings further injustice to prison scholarship.

far away from their research topics and do not have shared experiences with their subjects, and are thus unable to fully present well-rounded research.¹³⁴

Prison subculture is another layer of research that prison historians should understand when outlining inmate experiences. Subcultures within the prison are different from the relationship of society to the prison; association with this new society is known as prisonization.¹³⁵ Since this culture is confined to prison walls, writers cannot effectively present the culture distinctly unless they themselves have experienced and participated in that particular society. There have been several instances where formerly incarcerated women have published academic work on their experience and the state of current prisons. Angela Davis is a prime example of this writing trend, and for decades other prisons have encouraged inmate writing. Several organizations have commenced prison-writing workshops in state penitentiaries like Minnesota Prison Writing Workshop (MPWW) and the Indiana Revisionist History Project, which has worked with current inmates at the IWP.

Encouraging prison scholars to promote inmate experiences in their prison narratives will help bring non-scholarly readers to their research. Just like writers, readers may have a lack of interest in prison writing if they have no connection to the prison. It is not common for citizens to focus on the prison in their everyday life. Since the prison institution itself is hidden from public gatherings and populous communities, continuing to connect readers to inmate experiences will help humanize and sympathize readers to current prison subculture. In effect, it will help diminish the stigmas of incarceration and increase production of accessible scholarship.

¹³⁴ Beth Richie formulated this idea in her work, “Feminist Ethnographies of Women in Prison.” Many writers do not present their distance from their work as a limitation. For prison studies, most academics are not personally affected by the prison, and are simply looking in. The inclusion of real experiences of prisoners helps bridge the gap, but the full goal is to promote accounts of inmate’s primary sources.

¹³⁵ Pollock, *Women, Prison, and Crime*, 130.

Historians, both male and female, have a duty to fully discuss the American prison system. Historian L. Mara Dodge writes, “The 1868 biennial report [for Illinois Institutions] named one Miss Sadie Brown in a listing of all prison employees. Unfortunately, although she was employed for five years, neither the warden nor penitentiary inspectors ever referred to Matron Brown, and she remains as obscure as the female convicts themselves.”¹³⁶ If current standards for United States history do not include facets of the nation’s tumultuous relationship with the prison system, then the history of millions of incarcerated peoples will continue to be locked up behind prison walls. Bringing a focused scholarship on the Indianapolis Women’s Prison and the reformatory movement as a whole will help guide the “new progressives” of academia and prison activism.

¹³⁶ Dodge, “One Female Prisoner Is of More Trouble than Twenty Males,” 919.

Conclusion

The opening of the Indianapolis Women's Prison was the precursor to the foundation of America's current prison system. In many ways, it has been the last successful prison reform movement in American history. After protecting incarcerated women from some of the sexual harassment and abuse endured in co-ed prisons, the IWP emphasized literacy, education, and provided skill-building opportunities. While the gallows of the first prisons were left behind, the penitentiary model of the early 1800s was dissected and reorganized to form the new prisons of the Progressive Era. Though the reformatory movement did not fully reach the intended goals of the era, its legacy has endured: our current prison model is its offspring, and continues to be a deficient, negligent, and broken system. The prisons that had rampant abuse allegations and corruption scandals were never stopped; the institutions found guilty of misconduct were not torn down; complacency regarding the lack of inmate support has continually failed its citizens.¹³⁷

The new prison created in the culmination of Progressive Era efforts reflected substantial gains for inmate dignity, especially for white women, but later prison reform stalled. Tracing the standard models of prison operations and appearances to colonial archetypes, the current prison system is a failed colonial institution that has followed the same guidelines and standards for centuries. The current prison system has not been able to help rehabilitate inmates effectively or even slow national crime rates. In the context of current female incarceration facilities, the prison system continues to perpetuate detrimental gender roles. Many contemporary reformers argue that the system cannot be rehabilitated, reoriented, or reorganized to guarantee real change for

¹³⁷ Friedman, *Crime and Punishment in American History*, 159. Friedman believes that the current state of prisons cannot change if we keep the same system. It failed to reform and rehabilitate inmates during colonial times, reconstruction era, and in the twentieth century, can it ever be changed?

inmates' rights without the erasure of antiquated models and the subsequent reestablishment of the entire system.¹³⁸

Indiana's effective State Board of Charities and productive government allowed the opening of the first women's reformatory and separate women's institution, but lost its reform legacy during the punitive efforts of the 1970s. Currently, Indiana leads the Midwest with the highest incarceration rate per 100,000 citizens of any other in the region.¹³⁹ Overall, national trends show that women, specifically women of color, are the highest increasing subset of current incarceration rates. Measures to erase these increasing statistics can start with an increase of women-concentrated policies for new operational orders in prison facilities. Male-based approaches to rehabilitation cannot be transferred onto women's facilities; gender-specific measures must be produced to render positive results.

Much like the movement to bring inclusion of prison history into current academia, Americans need more comprehensive education on the current affairs of the Department of Justice and deserve accessible information about incarceration and the history of American prisons. Understanding this facet of American democracy and legislation will help eliminate stigmas and garner support to end laws such as the loss of voting rights for inmates, or ineligibility of juror duties.¹⁴⁰ Further, America's higher institutions also must adhere to these social changes and promote acceptance of formerly incarcerated people. Harvard's decision to rescind a Ph.D. program admissions offer from a former inmate of the Indianapolis Women's

¹³⁸ In current prisons, educational opportunities follow gender-specific guidelines. For example, in the Indianapolis Women's prison, cosmetology is offered for women, while wood-shop and forklift operation, traditional male curriculum, is offered at the Indiana State Penitentiary. To follow this debate in the Midwest, please refer to the NPR All Things Considered series on Incarceration in Indiana specifically Eli Hager, "Female Inmates in Indiana Pitch Plan to Rehab Empty Houses and Their Lives." *WFYI Indianapolis*, November 2, 2017.

¹³⁹ The Vera Institute of Justice, "United State Incarceration Trends" 2017.

¹⁴⁰ Inmate disenfranchisement is implemented in 47 states and the District of Columbia. Marc Mauer writes about the growing voting disparity in his article, "Felon Voting Disenfranchisement: A Growing Collateral Consequence of Mass Incarceration," *Federal Sentencing Reporter* Vol. 12, No. 5 (2000), 248-251.

Prison over the possible backlash from conservative news outlets and rejected applicants clashes with the myth that higher education is available for everyone.¹⁴¹

Narrative histories, and historians alike, are in a pivotal position to usher in change for incarcerated people of today. The history of prisons is a living history that continues to ebb and flow around current affairs and modern people who are intrinsically tied to historical institutes and policies. June 30th, 2017, was the day the Indianapolis Women's Prison was shut down; the 180 women incarcerated behind its walls were relocated, scattered throughout the state, and its workers were re-assigned elsewhere. But even as the IWP closed its doors, the women who remain incarcerated continue to be affected by the antique institution.

¹⁴¹ Eli Hager, "From prison to Ph.D.: The Redemption and Rejection of Michelle Jones," *The New York Times*. (New York, NY) September 13th, 2017.

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