

Our Indiana: A State of Disproportionality*

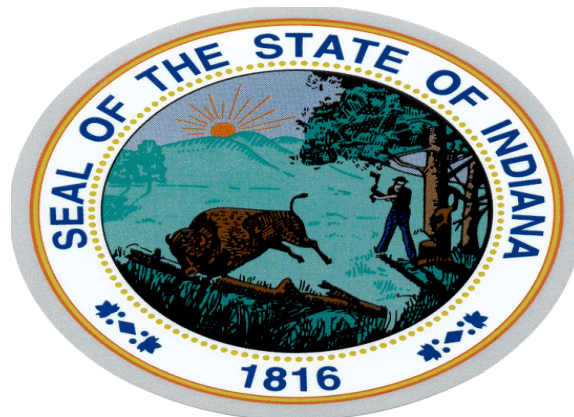
To open the first meeting of the 2008 Indiana Commission on Disproportionality in Youth Services, co-chair Dr. Michael Patchner shared an experience he had that morning which made him realize that although the findings and recommendations of the commission will be specifically for minorities, the outcomes of this effort will help all children and youth.

Dean Patchner opened the session by noting the commission had made copies of important information for members and put it in large 3-ring binders. He had to get them to the meeting. To help him get the large box holding the binders into the Indiana Government Center, he pushed the button at one of the entrances which automatically opened the doors for him.

This experienced helped him come to the realization that although the button/doors were there for the handicapped, this ability of the doors to open was a convenience everyone could use. This would also be the case for efforts of the commission, which would help everyone.

My experiences that morning

As I came into the center that same morning, I also pushed a similar button, which I do sometimes. Above the button was the Seal of the State of Indiana: the gentleman with an axe chopping down a tree, the buffalo jumping over a log, the hills, and the rising sun.



I was thinking about the potential of the commission and how this effort could be viable and make a difference. The fact that the state has the commission is good, but this also implies that Indiana has grave problems with disproportionality with respect to minorities. But "Why," I asked?

My thoughts returned to our state's seal. The week before, I had seen a PBS show on the geological history of Indiana. The prairie that extended from the Rockies east, ended in Indiana. Consequently, there were a lot of buffalo in Indiana.

Back to the seal: in it, the Natives were gone. The last buffalo was leaving. The trees were being axed. Women were excluded. Children were missing.

Thus, the seal of my state, to me, came to represent a worldview that we Hoosiers have had and continue to have. The seal says: some things and some people are dispensable. From the beginning of the state, buffalo and Natives were "disproportionately" removed from Indiana.

I believe this laid significant groundwork for the disproportional representation of minorities with respect to juvenile justice, welfare, mental health, and education that we experience today. The following are examples of the groundwork.

Indiana's Trail of Tears

I sense this "climate of disproportionality" that helped produce the seal enabled Hoosiers to rationalize the use of "trickery and treachery" to remove Natives in our state's 1838 "Trail of tears." Here, 300 of out 850 Potawatomi died marching west in what Indiana historian Harold Allison portrayed as "bordering on the criminal." Before the arrival of Europeans, Indiana (now ironically called "The Land of Indians") had over 15 tribes (Allison, 1986).

Indiana's 1907 Eugenics Law: Codifying normalcy

In fact, I sense that this climate was fertile ground for the seeds of "disproportionality" manifested in the rationale and creation of the 1907 Eugenics law, the world's first. Hoosiers then not only had "scientific proof" that some individuals and groups were inferior and dispensable, but had legal government policy to back up their assumptions, stereotypes, and prejudices. Indiana became so efficient at neutralizing its "large degenerate population" that the policy was adopted by the German Nazis toward its "unfit." The Nazi name for forced sterilization was "the Indiana Procedure" (Eugenics in Indiana, 2008; Gatto, 2001).

What Hoosier thinker influenced the rationale for the eugenics law?

The precursor to and perhaps the catalyst of the 1907 law were the new views of the poor and poverty (pauperism) that arose in the late 1800s in Indianapolis--proposed and spread by Indianapolis Reverend Oscar C. McCulloch (Ruswick, 2008).

Rev. McCulloch initially believed pauperism (paupers were the "unworthy poor" who supposedly chose to live off relief that they obtained by deceiving charities) was a biological pre-disposition--a sort of "pauper gene" passed on from parents to children. If the child grew up in a family of paupers, her/his predisposition would be activated and she/he "would descend into a lazy, mendacious lifestyle." Consequently, it became reasonable to propose that forcible restrictions of marriage and reproductive rights might be the best way to deal with the biologically "unfit" (Ruswick, 2008).

This became a policy of "scientific charity" based on research and data. Between 1877 and the early 1890s, scientific charity reformers created a Charity Organization Society in hope of distinguishing cases of "real need" from cases of pauperism. The society later becomes The United Way of Indianapolis (Kramer, 2008).

Of course, this fit well with the long-standing politically conservative Hoosier climate valuing individual responsibility and little government interference regarding social welfare.

Although Rev. McCulloch eventually rejected the idea that poverty was an inherited moral problem caused by a "biological predisposition to pauperism" these original arguments were used to justify "genetically based social control" in the form of Indiana laws compelling mandatory sterilization of "mental defectives" (Kramer, 2008).

Some current social work orientations continue this legacy. Rather than attack the material sources/conditions of the poor's misery, some social welfare professionals believe we must improve the character of the poor. Defining the "underclass" in terms of "bad behavior" not poverty, the poor simply need "improved" (Katz, 1995).

Another "forced exodus"

A little explored part of Indiana history Hoosiers (and commission members) must not forget and also reconcile is what researchers Mohl and Betten (1987, p. 136) call "the forced exodus" (called "repatriation" by local officials) of up to 4,000 Mexican immigrants from Gary and East Chicago in 1932. The forced expulsion, followed by harassment and discrimination against the remaining Mexicans, was not just a product of the Great Depression of the early 30s, but iterates the "nativists" ethos of disproportionality I see as normal in Hoosier culture. Our state's seal is the metaphor for this characteristic of Indiana.

The KKK

Few states experienced stronger anti-foreign sentiment or a more active Ku Klux Klan. In fact, Indiana was the national stronghold of the Klan in the 1920s. I sense that the perhaps "unconscious" influence of the seal lay behind this part of our history as well.

Organizations and events surrounding the creation of Attucks

I sense the image in our state seal also made the ground fertile for the Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) creation of Crispus Attucks High School in 1927.* To some this was wrong. But to most, due to the underlying ethos pictured and expressed in the Seal of the State of Indiana, it was as OK in the early 1900s as it was in the early 1800s to marginalize certain people.

Post WW II Indianapolis

Reacting to the new global politics of the two superpowers (USA and USSR) and changes in demographics due to the second south to north Great Migration, Indianapolis prepared for the rest of the 20th century.

Politics

Formed by the growth of the American anti-communist movement after WW II, the ultra-conservative and patriotic John Birch Society was established in Indianapolis on December 9, 1958 (John Birch Society, n.d.). The Birch Society fit well into an Indianapolis pro-establishment political climate reflected by noted conservative, local power broker, and active Republican Party supporter Eugene C. Pulliam owner/publisher of the *Indianapolis Star*, *Indianapolis News*, and the politically conservative *Arizona Republic* (Eugene C. Pulliam, n.d.).

Even the *Saturday Evening Post* (n.d.) was published in Indianapolis. The magazine with a conservative viewpoint and strong admiration for material success, appealed to America's white middle-class. Having several owners since it was founded in 1821, the *Post* was

purchased by Indy business tycoon and supporter of the local *status quo*, Republican councilman Dr. Beurt SerVaas in 1970. It was published here until 2012. Dr. SerVass, a key architect of the 1970 Unigov (Ksander, 2007) plan to establish local Republican Party dominance, was the president of the Indianapolis City-County Council from 1970 to 1997.

Education

This ethos of disproportionality was manifested again during the 1950s. In 1953, Emmerich Manual High School (1895) moved from 501 South Meridian Street and re-opened at 2405 Madison Avenue. In this "old Manual" building, Harry E. Wood High School also opened in 1953. As a result of its near-south side location, the old Manual neighborhood and Wood were filled with working-class Black and white families from the South's second Great Migration. The children of these new "Southsiders" would have attended Manual, thus integrating a majority white school, but Manual had moved. Because of these demographic changes, Wood became characterized as a place for a curriculum based on "vocationalism" and a school for "laggard learners" (Rummell, 1957) with a staff who "were willing to love the unlovely" (Encyclopedia of Indianapolis, 1994b).

Well into the 1960s, Indianapolis had a reputation as one of the most segregated northern cities (Encyclopedia of Indianapolis, 1994a). In this 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education context, Washington Township opened North Central High School (Shortridge No. 3**) in 1956. To hamper and avoid the requirements of Brown v. Board, IPS Arlington (1961), Northwest (1962), and John Marshall (1968) each opened as supermajority white schools. If perpetuating racial segregation in Indianapolis were not a plan, it was a pattern.

I sense that the seal influenced the 1970s effort of IPS to circumvent federal desegregation requirements. In 1971, a federal law suit and Judge Hugh Dillon found IPS guilty of *de jure* segregation. In 1973, the Indiana Department of Education was found complicit in "inhibiting desegregation." In 1975, Unigov (the form of city-county government created and controlled by the Indiana Republican Party) was criticized as an idea which helped maintain segregation.

Indianapolis as "Up South": Know your place and stay there

According to Indy's own Mari Evans this ethos of disproportionality is due to Indianapolis being "Up South." Evans realized, as she grew up, that Indiana was the most northern state of the South, a place many southerners migrated to after WW I and II. This "know your place and stay in it" mentality, manifested and reinforced in our state, is explained in what she writes:

Many Black folk thought of Indianapolis as urban, "Up South." It was better than being "down South," but it retained many of the negative propositions of the deep South and was not yet enlightened and "progressive" as the West or East Coast counterparts. Conservatism and racism were alive and compatible (p. 27).

She also marks Indianapolis as a place that enables disproportionality:

For the span of my memory this has been a city of opposing wills, two faces firmly set toward different directions--one covertly determined to maintain the status quo, to continually block the access to power or parity; the other advocating active morality and its right to inclusion as an equal entity rather than a colonized one. This has been a city

a perpetual confrontation, however cloaked, between the powerless and those who influence, control, and engineer the city's movements in its inexorable and often ruthless march toward "greatness," a word for which my definition will hardly suffice (p. 26).

IPS as leader: The over-diagnosis of black males as mentally retarded

I sense the legacy of the seal can be found in the 2006 report from the Schott Foundation (Holzman, 2006) which acted as a mirror and reminder that Indiana/Indianapolis has not changed (Loflin, 2007). The report not only listed IPS as having (for its size) the worst 2003/04 graduation rate for males in the country (22% for white males/21% for black males; see p. 5), but our district was the worst in our nation for over-diagnosing Black males as mentally retarded (MR) by 5 times the standard! Out of the 12,185 Black males enrolled in IPS, 915 were diagnosed as MR. See p. 13 of the 2006 Schott report.

None of this happened overnight

Yet, none of this happened overnight. This disproportionality is the norm in Indiana. It has been taught to us Hoosiers quietly, subtly over the last 200 years: It's OK. It's normal that minorities are over-represented in prisons, special education, mental health clinics, and on welfare rolls.

The holocaust of the buffalo, the holocaust of the Aborigines reflected in the Great Seal of Indiana must be seen as a backdrop to understanding that Indiana is *a state of disproportionality*.

My position

My argument is this commission cannot forget this Indiana history or it will repeat it. The commission's findings and recommendations will not reach their full historical potential unless it confronts the legacy, though latent, that in Indiana disproportionality is acceptable; that indeed, certain individuals and groups because of their genetics, culture, color, or individual morals actually validate their disproportional status.

Power concedes nothing without a demand: Moral authority as a basis for action

Since, as Fredrick Douglas said, "Power concedes nothing without a demand," our committee must recognize and at least attempt to reconcile these issues in order to have the moral authority to justify the indignation to demand the changes in the system we recommend.

Otherwise we will stay locked in an attempt to improve the 20th century, reshuffling old answers to old questions, confusing this rearrangement with the completely new paradigm which is compelled by this 21st century.

John Harris Loflin

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* Attucks stayed segregated until 1967. We cannot forget both Gary Roosevelt (1925) and Evansville Lincoln (1927) opened as all-Black high schools.

** To understand the connection between the integration of Shortridge and the creation of North Central see John Loflin's "An Oral History of the Indianapolis Public Schools 1920-2000." Also see: Wm. F. Gulde's *Hopes, Dreams, and Books: The Story of North Central High School 1956-2004*. Indianapolis, IN: Par Digital Imaging.

This essay was a personal letter to the members of the Education Committee of the 2008 Indiana Commission of Disproportionality in Youth Services in an attempt to inform their conscience about Indiana history and politics. For more on the commission, see: <http://www.in.gov/legislative/igareports/agencyarchive/reports/DCS14.pdf>

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