"THERE" IS HOME: A CASE STUDY OF THE COLORED ORPHAN ASYLUM IN NEW YORK CITY

By

MELBA BUTLER

Figure 1. Cover photo of Riverdale Colored Orphan Asylum courtesy of Harlem Dowling-West Side Center for Children and Family Services

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C 2012

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Social Welfare in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

“*THERE*” IS HOME: A CASE STUDY OF THE COLORED ORPHAN ASYLUM IN NEW YORK CITY

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The General Report to the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection in 1933 stated that as a rule “*public and private agencies for dependent children have not concerned themselves with the special problems of the Negro, Mexican, Puerto Rican and Indian...Differences in culture, tradition, language and other factors of race and nationality call for a special body of knowledge and specialized methods of meeting those needs that are common to all. Failure to understand this has resulted in the neglect of certain groups, and lack of the needed specialized care*" (Folks & Murphy, 1933, 17). More than 75 years later, findings indicate that youth exciting foster care are still fairing poorly despite varied policy and practice initiatives; Black youth, who are disproportionately represented out of home placement, have poorer outcomes than other populations (Hilliard, 2011; Hook & Courtney, 2011; Naccarato, Megan & Courtney, 2010; Osgood, Foster & Courtney, 2010; Center for Urban Futures, 2011).

This inquiry seeks to broaden the discourse about best practices for Black children through case study of the Riverdale Colored Orphan Asylum in NYC, (COA), an historical institution founded specifically to serve Black children. Through oral and

written narrative it unearths the experiences of COA just prior to the dissolution of its institutional care program. Findings suggest further study of the role of congregate care that might lead to improved outcomes for targeted populations of youth. The study also identifies how positive outcomes for children in care were impacted by reciprocity between COA and its targeted Black community.

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Most of all---the respondents who allowed me to enter their lives

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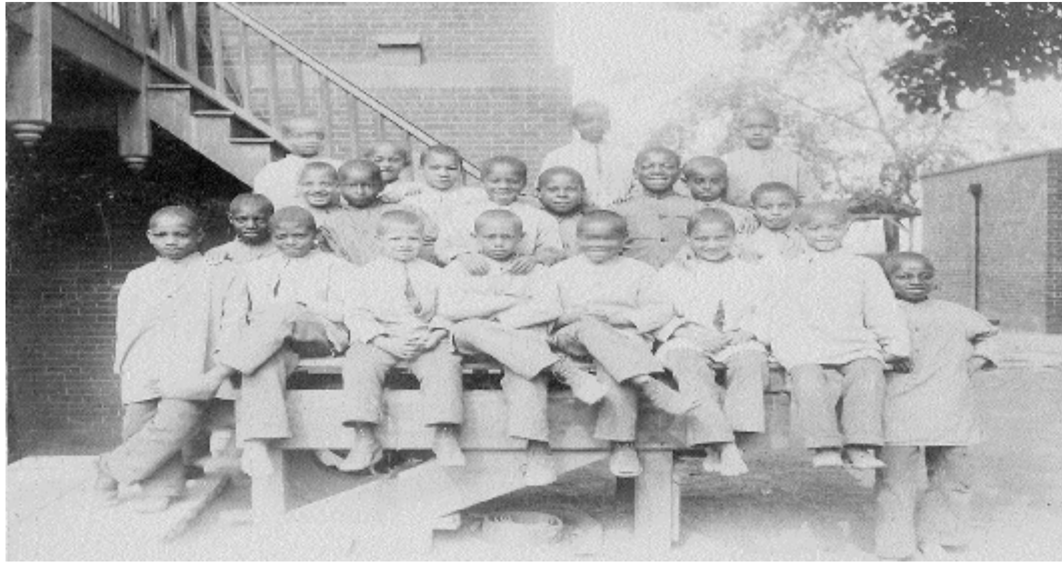

Figure 2. Undated photo of COA children, courtesy of Harlem Dowling-West Side Center for Children and Family Services (HDWC) circa 19th century

INTRODUCTION

> *"At that time they didn't have black history. The children were told* (by their teachers) *that they didn't have parents so it was important for them to know themselves. They gave us black history. They took us on trips to Wall Street, the stock market, Radio City. They prepared us to leave Riverdale and be self-sufficient*….
>
> *The products they were turning out were very productive people. Today you don't have them; you have prisoners. You are not turning out productive people".*
>
> **Mr. Everett[1]**

During a long career in child welfare, over half of which was spent serving as Executive Director of Harlem Dowling-West Side Center for Children and Family Services, an historically Black child welfare institution in New York City, I developed several "informed" perspectives on the plight of Black children in the child welfare system and how they could best be served. These perspectives, shaped by education, professional experience, the literature and socialization as an African American, included a firm belief that many of these children could be served best in their homes or within their own communities with appropriate resources and supports. If removal was warranted, home-based care was categorically appropriate for most children and conversely orphanage or institutional care for children was not the placement of choice for most children. Further, I believed that community based agencies with ethnic or racial

[1] A pseudonym.

connections to the children's communities tended to be more fully integrated into their host communities and were therefore best equipped to meet the full range of a child and family's needs.

Given the above stated perspective and a pre-disposed opposition to orphanage care, the comments of an African American orphanage alumna who lived in the Riverdale Children's Association (RCA) until the mid-1940s came as a surprise. RCA founded as the Colored Orphan Asylum in 1836, was a predecessor to Harlem Dowling-West Side Center for Children and Family Services. This lineage makes the institution the oldest organization in the country providing out of home care for Black children.[2] The alumnus, Mrs. Bernard[3], a woman over 75 years in age, had traveled from Virginia to New York City to attend a symposium/reunion focused on RCA co-hosted by Harlem Dowling-West Side Center, the Hebrew Home for the Aged and Lehman College.

During an informal discussion at the reunion, Mrs. B. shared how choked up she had been when she visited the former site of RCA while on a vacation trip to NYC and saw that it was now a home for the aged. As she pondered why the

[2]The writer served as executive director of the organization from 1990-2006 beginning one year after the 1989 merger between Harlem Dowling and the historical West Side Center for Children and Family Services. Harlem Dowling Children's Services was founded in 1969 as a pilot program of Spence Chapin Services for Children. Jane Edwards, the first African American executive of this adoption agency, responded to charges by Giovannoni & Billingsley (1972), that traditional white childcare agencies were not adequately serving the needs of the Black community. Edwards convinced her board president, Alice Hall Dowling, to establish a foster care and adoption program based in Central Harlem.

[3] Bernard is a pseudonym. Throughout this study the identity of respondents will be protected by the use of pseudonyms. Consistent with the African American tradition of addressing elders or people in authority, respondents are called by their full surnames, or endearingly by their initials prefaced by "Ms.", "Miss", "Mrs.". or "Mr.". In a focus group of respondents that included a former nurse from COA, the alumni referred to her by her surname in deference, and she called them "the boys"; they were all in excess of 70 years old. Although I am decades younger, on occasion, some of the respondents addressed me as "Ms. B", an endearment consistent with my role as former executive director. This tradition is noticeably observable in African American child welfare agencies where staff, children and parents most often use surnames rather than first names to address one another.

orphanage had closed she spoke movingly about the positive memories she had about her experience in the Riverdale Children's Association and described RCA as "*my home*". With a career consisting of many years as a Black professional working in child welfare management where family living for children in placement is widely seen as the norm of the field, I was left feeling confused by her comments. I was equally thrown off by learning about her successes and those of her colleagues in achieving productive adulthoods, especially when the current academic evidence suggests that so many of the children served in the current system are ill-prepared for productive lives (Curtis, Dale & Kendall; 1999, Hill, 2006).

Although, in my professional experience many youth leave foster care to achieve successful and productive lives, research has shown that youth exiting foster care are more likely to join the rolls of public assistance, unemployment, the homeless, incarcerated, and pregnant and parenting teens (Curtis, Dale & Kendall, 1999; Hilliard, 2011; Hook & Courtney, 2011; Naccarato, Megan & Courtney, 2010; Osgood, Foster & Courtney, 2010; Center for Urban Futures, 2011). In addition, Black children in foster care have longer stays in foster care, receive fewer needed services, and achieve poorer outcomes than do their White counterparts (ACS, October/2009; Anderson, Ryan & Leashore, 1997; Hill, 2006; McRoy, 2005). Among African-Americans, the rate of employment of former foster youths at age 24 was 40% compared to 60% among White youth and 48% employment in the general population (Center for Urban Futures, 2011; Courtney as cited in Hilliard, 2011).

My initial experience with Mrs. Bernard and other alumni in attendance at the reunion made me question what I thought I knew and what the scholarship pointed to. It inspired me and made me think that there was more to learn than I may have originally imagined about orphanages through the lived experiences of Riverdale Children's Association alumni. For example, removed from her family and community as a child, what made Mrs. Bernard so fondly reminiscent of her life at Riverdale? Did institutional life contribute to these fond memories? Or, perhaps was it that she was placed in an institution that was created specifically to serve Black children? What were the elements of that experience that reflected its "raison d'etre? What was the essence of that experience? Would an understanding of life in this institution and how that "life" contributed to a positive experience for these alumni have additive value to the current discourse on how to best serve the overrepresentation of Black children within the child welfare system and achieve improved outcomes for them?

The literature and research focusing on the issues of disproportionate representation of children of color and Black children specifically within the child welfare system is growing (Billingsley & Giovannoni, 1972; Dunbar & Barth, 2008; Hill, 2006; McRoy, 2005; Roberts, 2001). Yet, a review of the literature on child welfare policy and practice reflects an apparent absence of data about early institutions created to care for Black children or consideration of how knowledge about these experiences might contribute to current policy and practice. This lost knowledge may be a contributing factor in the demise of the few existing child welfare institutions specifically created to care for children of color. Moreover, in

New York City, which has one of the nation's largest populations of children placed in care, the absence of historical knowledge may be a factor in the assertion that there is no added value to child welfare agencies created specifically to serve Black or brown children; that creation of these institutions are a "*failed social experiment*" (New York Times, December, 2007).

Some historical narratives have added knowledge that contributed greatly to the child welfare discourse. Holt's work (1992), on the Orphan Trains experience, gave voice to the 150,000 (mostly White) children and youth relocated between 1854 and 1930 in a movement that was a counter to the institutionalization of children (Cook, 1995). The Orphan Train movement mostly associated with Charles Loring Brace, founder of the Children's Aid Society, placed children with host families and was intended to give children and youth an opportunity for a better life. The moving narratives collected by Holt (1992) contribute to our understanding of the role of poor immigrant White children as a labor force for developing Midwestern towns while concurrently reducing the number of unskilled and dependent children in congested urban communities; and the American socialization process that was embedded in the placing out experience.

<u>The Home on Gorham Street, the Voices of its Children,</u> (Goldstein, 1996) provides narrative from children cared for in an Orthodox Jewish orphanage in Rochester New York. The study adds to our knowledge of the role of the sectarian orphanage in preserving the religious and cultural heritage of immigrant Jewish children. It exposes the fallacy in the nomenclature that identified

children as “orphans” when many had at least one surviving parent and some had a working parent who boarded their children partly for economic reasons, and examines the life and the meanings attributed to the experience of growing up in the Rochester Jewish Children’s Home. In exploring the question of “Institution versus Family” as a choice for children needing placement, Goldstein suggests that child welfare professionals erroneously compare the merits of institutional care with idealized concepts of “family” (birth, foster or adopted). A comparable study of an institution created to serve Black children, the dominant population in today’s child welfare system, might not only expand on these findings by unearthing the unique narratives of its wards, it could add knowledge rooted in the cultural and historical experience of African Americans.

I. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The twenty-first century child welfare system in the United States is different in many significant ways from its origins---in ideology, in the number of children served, in the race and ethnicity of the population and in models of service delivery. In the 19th century the issue facing society was clearly the care of poor dependent White immigrant children. Twentieth century discourse included a range of issues; from institutional vs. family based care of children, parent's rights vs. children's rights, family preservation vs. child removal, to the role of the government as well as the cost and efficacy of varied approaches to caring for dependent children (Katz, 1996; McGowan, 2005). In an historical review of child welfare, McGowan (2005, p10) states, "One theme that never disappears is the search for a 'panacea', a solution to the problems of children whose parents are unable to provide adequate care." The dawn of the 21st century found a continuation of the 20th century discourse further complicated by a system that is overpopulated, increasingly costly in an era of more limited resources and disproportionately represented by "children of color" (Hill, 2006; McRoy, 2005; Roberts, 2001).

From 1950 forward, there has been an exponential growth in the number of children and youth within the child welfare system, particularly African American children and youth. In 1997, the federal government enacted the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) intended to reduce the length of stay of

children in foster care and consequently reduce the number of children in out of home care (www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/asfa.html). The ASFA legislation makes child safety a priority and mandates strict guidelines and timeframes for the permanency decision-making process for children in foster care (McGowan, 2005; White House Memo, 1996). Since the enactment of ASFA there has been a reduction in the overall number of children and youth in placement but the percentage of children and youth of color remains disproportionally high (AFCARS, 2010; Hill, 2006).

The representation of Black/African American, Native American/Alaskan Native, Hispanic, Asian and Pacific Islander children varies by state and locale. Unlike Black/African American and Native American/Alaskan children who are disproportionately represented in overall foster care, data Hispanic (21%) and Asian and Pacific Islander (0%) children tend to be over-represented only in some communities (AFCARS, 2010). In 2010, Native American/Alaskan Native children were 2% and Black children were 29% of a total population of 408,425 US children in foster care (AFCARS, 2010). In New York State with one of the largest foster care populations, 47.2% were African American children (OCFS, 2008).

The problem of how to best serve the disproportionate number of Black children in the US child welfare system is complex and multi-faceted. The solutions proposed by policymakers, practitioners and others are grounded in their worldview (National Review, 1994; Pollit, 1995; Smith, 1995). Child welfare policy in the 20th century included dramatic shifts of financial and ideological

focus beginning with the Social Security Act that appropriated entitlements for the deserving poor, to the Contract with America that eliminated most entitlements (http://www.heritage.org/Research/Lecture/The-Contract-with-America-Implementing-New-Ideas-in-the-US); shifts between emphasis on child removal, family preservation and child safety. A growing conservative ideology led to policy solutions that focus on the removal of the barriers to adoption, re-visiting of congregate or orphanage care, expedited termination of parental rights and the removal of income support entitlements (Maluccio & Anderson, 2000; McGowan, 2005).

Historical knowledge can contribute to the quality of problem solving. "A study of history can broaden a discourse and add depth to our efforts to address *a* contemporary social problem" (Danto, 2008, p18.) Yet, intentionally or by default, recorded history typically reflects the dominant worldview and excludes the voices of marginalized populations, e.g., women, children, the poor, people of color. History itself is subjective and based on what has been captured and the perspective of the person(s) writing the story (Danto, 2008). Solutions designed to address the problem of the care of the disproportionate number of Black children in the child welfare system must include an historical perspective. Looking back in order to move forward requires a reconstruction of child welfare history that captures the missing story of the care of dependent Black children.

Child Welfare in the US

The formal child welfare system in the US and its models of care evolved in response to the need to care for growing numbers of orphaned or half orphaned White immigrant children in the 19th century. Although poverty was a factor in the circumstances of these children, it was not poverty alone that elicited society's response. The institutions that evolved for children and other vulnerable populations (elderly, disabled) provided care for "deserving" populations who could not otherwise care for themselves (Hasci, 1995).

The primary means of caring for children and youth in the 19th century was in congregate care facilities or orphanages, as they were more commonly known. Orphanages served several purposes. They provided refuge for vagrant abandoned children living on the streets, presumably preventing their "wards" from engaging in criminal behaviors. Varying in size and conditions, orphanages typically relied on structure and regime to socialize dependent children, insure that they developed American values and were inculcated with the morals, traditions and values of the respective religious groups i.e., Catholicism, Judaism, Protestantism, etc. (Crenson, 1998; Lundberg, 1947; Olasky, 1997; O'Neill, Murray & Gesiriech, 2004; Saksena, 2006). Immigrants from Ireland and Eastern Europe, concerned about the assimilation of their children, "looked to Catholic institutions to perpetuate their heritage and culture" (Crenson, 1998, p41). The care of dependent children became a major service of the Catholic Church, enabling it to become the largest caregiver for dependent children. Black

and Jewish children were excluded from these institutions (Folks, 1971; Crenson, 1998; Olasky, 1997).

What Has Changed?

Today's child welfare system cares for children from all religious, racial and ethnic groups. Most are not orphaned or abandoned, but are the victims of abuse or neglect. Neglect is most frequently cited as the primary reason children are removed from the custody of their parents and placed in foster care," according to the US General Accounting Office (Thoma, 1989-2004). High rates of child neglect parallel poverty levels. Though experts stop short of identifying poverty as a precursor to neglectful parenting or asserting that all impoverished parents neglect their children, "the emotional, social, environmental and financial pressures associated with living in poverty place stresses on families that also increase the likelihood of children being neglected" (Gil, D. as cited in Pelton, 1978). While it is the gross incidences of physical or sexual abuse that garner public attention, over 50% of the children that were placed in foster care in 2001 were as a result of findings of neglect rather than abuse. Although, the long-term impact of neglect should not be minimized, cases of minor social deprivation are more likely to result in foster care than physical abuse (Solomon, 1973; Thoma, 1989-2004).

Through a vast network of public, private and quasi-governmental agencies the child welfare system investigates allegations of child maltreatment, provides services to troubled families and both "temporary" and adoptive placement of children (CWLA, 2000). The child welfare system continues to

primarily serve the poor, who are more likely to come to the attention of authorities and whose children are more likely to be placed in out of home care (Charlow, 2001; Roberts, 2001). The changing role of government, a shift away from congregate care towards family-based care for dependent children and the proportion of non-White children in out of home care are other significant changes. Government has assumed primary responsibility and authority over the care of dependent children in the system although the physical care is shared with an array of non-sectarian and religious sponsored organizations that contract with government (McGowan, 2005). From the early 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century institutional care of dependent children was the norm (Crenson, 1998; Lundberg, 1947; Olasky, 1997). The 1909 White House Conference on Children marked a dramatic philosophical shift from congregate care provided by institutions like COA as the normative method for caring for dependent children, to family based care as the preferred option.

Society's growing disillusionment with institutions and resulting diminution of financial support for them contributed to deteriorating programs, less innovation and growing disuse of congregate (residential) facilities (Maluccio & Anderson, 2000; Pecora, et al., 2000). The limited study of the effectiveness of varied types of residential care also contributed to the disuse of congregate care for children as much as the belief that most children do best when reared in family homes (Maluccio & Anderson, 2000; Southwell & Fraser, 2010). During most of the 110 years of the COA orphanage, placement in a family home

operated or funded by the institution was not an available option (From Cherry Street, 1936; Leonard, 1956).

"Temporary" family based care with non-relative or relative (kinship) foster families is the prevailing best practice approach for most children currently. Increasingly, children and youth with physical and mental health challenges as well as youthful offenders are cared for in specialized community based family homes where providers receive additional support and training.

The assimilation of Eastern European Whites into mainstream America, ideological shifts, the migration of poor Blacks to northern urban ghettos in search of employment, federal changes in social policy and racial biases in decision-making about the necessity for child removal and family readiness for reunification post-removal are contributing factors to a growing racial and ethnic disparity within the child welfare population (Crenson, 1998; Folks, 1933; Folks, 1971; Hill, 2006; Roberts, 2001). Some experts suggest that the relationship between race and family poverty may lead to a foster care system that is dominated by "children of color" in the 21st century (Courtney & Maluccio, 1997).

For over 70 years, one dimension of the child welfare discourse has been the question of the appropriateness of prevailing models of care for addressing the needs of dependent non-White children (Charlow, 2001; Curtis, 1997; Folks, 1933; Roberts, 2002; Smith, et. al, 1992). Compared to the present, the level of representation of children of color was significantly less skewed in the 1930's yet the system's failure to adequately address the needs of "children of color" was already a concern.

In the General Report to the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection in 1933, it states that as a rule "*public and private agencies for dependent children have not concerned themselves with the special problems of the Negro, Mexican, Puerto Rican and Indian...Differences in culture, tradition, language and other factors of race and nationality call for a special body of knowledge and specialized methods of meeting those needs that are common to all. Failure to understand this has resulted in the neglect of certain groups, and lack of the needed specialized care*" (Folks & Murphy, 1933, p.17).

Standardized policy and practice reflected a "one size fits all approach" to the needs of the dependent child that failed to examine the impact of race, ethnicity or language, within the context of the dominant White culture (Crenson, 1998; Everett, 1991). It ignored the role that race and ethnicity plays in how a child sees him/herself as a member of society and how that child is viewed by the larger society (Marsiglia, 2009). Billingsley and Giovanonni (1972, pp. 91-92) note that, "*with manumission, government attempted to fulfill African American's specific needs in a universal fashion; consequently, many of the particular issues of the African American community would be ignored and reduced to the least common denominator of the larger society*".

Universal solutions apparently have been unsuccessful. There is an emerging body of literature on "disproportionality" or over-representation, and its companion---disparity or inequitable services. According to the literature, Black children are more likely to be removed from their homes, be placed outside of their home communities, stay in foster care for longer periods of time, receive

fewer needed services and fair poorer outcomes (Curtis & Kendall, 1999; Dunbar, K & Barth, 2008; Hill, 2006; McRoy, 2005; 1999; Roberts, 2001).

In 2004, the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS), the governmental body that oversees child welfare services, launched a Racial Equity Task Force to identify disparity within its services and monitor initiatives to impact inequity. ACS initiated sweeping programmatic changes with a goal of improving outcomes for children. Yet, a review of internally tracked ACS data from CY2005 to CY2008 shows persistent over-representation of Black children. Blacks decreased from 29 to 27% of NYC's overall child population. Yet new foster care admissions of Black children ranged between 45 and 53.8%. Black children were the subjects of 42% of substantiated reports of abuse and neglect and persistently comprised 57% of the total number of children in care over the review period (ACS, October/ 2009).

ACS data confirmed that NYC's Black children in foster care generally receive inadequate, substandard or ill-designed services, information already known to most child welfare professionals. In the 1970's non-governmental child welfare agencies in NYC, many of which were sectarian with substantial endowments, were excluding or only selectively accepting dependent Black children into their care[4] (Bernstein, 2001; Billingsley & Giovannoni, 1972). Black

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[4] The 1987 Wilder Settlement is credited with ending the discriminatory practice of denying black children access to placements in traditionally White child welfare agencies in New York. The case was named after Shirley Wilder, age 16. Filed in 1972, the lawsuit challenged NYC foster care placement practices as unconstitutional, citing discriminatory placement practices that violated the 1st Amendment separation of Church and State and 14th Amendment guarantee of equal protection. It also cited violation of the 8th Amendment asserting that children were denied adequate services and were sent to institutions where they were subjected to cruel and unusual punishment. It took 14 years for the courts to find in favor of the plaintiff, by which time the named plaintiff had a child in foster care (Bernstein, 2001).

children are now the primary population served by NYC's child welfare providers. However, it is striking to note that despite legislative, policy and practice changes, and policy that mandates that all child welfare providers serve Black children, these children still fair poorly in comparison to their White counterparts (Hill, 2006).

Some policy analysts identified a need for agencies specifically designed for Black children (ACS Task Force Report on Minority Foster Care Agencies, 2005; Billingsley & Giovononni, 1972; Carten & Dumpson, 1997; Roberts, 2001). ACS Task Force members (2005) reported that agencies designed for Black children include community involvement in policy development, governance, service design and delivery thereby improving the likelihood of culturally relevant services. In the 1980's, as a result of legislative action, New York State funded the development of four foster care programs in community-based agencies of color---Committee for Hispanic Children and Families, Family Support Systems, Inc., Child Development Support Corporation and Concord Family Services. Only one of these agencies, the Committee for Hispanic Children and Families continues in operation as a foster care provider due to a variety of factors including management and operational challenges compounded by limited financial reserves. Several other community based foster care agencies of color were developed during this period as well but are either closed or no longer in operation as foster care providers e.g., Miracle Makers, PRACA, Concord Family Services, Family Support Systems, Richard Allen Center on Life, etc.

Harlem Dowling Children's Services, the junior part of Harlem Dowling West-Side Center for Children and Family Services, was created in 1969 as an offshoot of the Spence Chapin Adoption Agency in direct response to Giovannoni & Billingsley's (1972) challenge to traditional White adoption agencies that services be "conceived, designed, managed and staffed to serve the specific needs of Black children in the context of Black families and the Black community" (Billingsley & Giovannoni, 1972, pp. 91-92). Referring to the Billingsley & Giovanni study, Jane D. Edwards, Executive Director of the Spence-Chapin Adoption Service, the parent organization of Harlem Dowling Children's Services, stated "*I was so greatly impressed with the entire study, its purpose, its philosophy and recommendations, that I asked our Board of Directors to …set up an agency in the Black community that will become an independent agency"* (Billingsley & Giovanni, 1972, p.184).

Thirty-five years later, a three part New York Times series on minority foster care agencies (December, 2007) questioned the viability, management and quality of services of minority foster care agencies. Some experts in child welfare were most vocal in their vigorous admonishment of the article's failure to address systemic inequities that place children of color at greater risk of placement, the often ineffectual and devaluing system that responds to them or the responsiveness of "agencies of color" to an overburdened system (Butler, 2007; Guggenheim 2007). Academic, philanthropic and child welfare leaders attributed the operational challenges faced by some of the agencies with under-financing, poor management and leadership, as well as the lack of endowments

and wealthy donor bases to support the sustained development of the core infrastructure of these organizations (Bosman, Nov/2009). A study commissioned by NYC's Administration for Children's Services (2005) noted the absence of analysis, acknowledgement, or replication of effective practice models emanating from these community-based organizations with "minority" auspices.

Orphanages: A Recycled Solution

One proposed solution to the growing number of children in foster care received considerable attention in the public discourse at the end of the 20th century. During the 1990's, a highly conservative period during which Newt Gingrich was Speaker of the US House of Representatives, there was heated debate about Gingrich's advocacy for a return to orphanages as a more desirable and cost effective way to care for children in out of home placement. This proposal was presented after over 80 years of declining professional and public support for orphanage or residential care of children (The Gingrich proposal referenced romanticized images from Boys Town (an orphanage in Omaha, Nebraska) as depicted in the movie by the same name (National Review, 1994). This proposal was part of an overall reform package that threatened to ban public assistance for single mothers increasing the prospect that the foster care system (populated by children from poor families [sic] poor unwed mothers) would flood beyond its limits (Politt, 1995).

The revisiting of residential care for children correlated with the concern that the child welfare system had grown to 500,000 children who were

disproportionately Black (Maluccio & Anderson, 2000). Not since President Theodore Roosevelt's White House Conference on Children in 1909, which marked the country's policy shift towards family homes as the optimal environment to care for dependent children, had there been support for mass congregate care of children. In fact, at the First White House Conference on Children, President Roosevelt declared, "*Home life is the highest and finest product of civilization. Children should not be denied it, except for urgent and compelling reasons*" (Leonard, 1956; O'Donnell, 1994). What then was the basis for a reversal to an earlier approach to childcare; were Black children less entitled to a home environment?

The Gingrich proposal was part of President Ronald Reagan's "Contract with America" aimed at tax reduction and cutting federal spending particularly in social programs. In response to the Gingrich proposal, politicians, academicians, child welfare leaders and the public argued vehemently in support of or against orphanage care (McLaughlin, 1995; McLean, 1999; Olasky, 1997; Pollit, 1994; Smith, 1995; Whittaker, 2000). Opponents evoked "Dickensonian" images of orphanage life as unsafe, loveless and counter-productive to positive youth development and viewed community based family home as the more ideal and appropriate setting for child rearing (Pollitt, 1995). McLauglin (1995) characterized the Gingrich solution as "*reinstating the dangerous and regressive system of the 19th century…by redirecting AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children*, the section of the Social Security Act of 1935 that provides financial support to families with dependent children), *to the construction of orphanages*

for poor women's offspring". Others charged that orphanage care child rearing negatively impacts children's cognitive development and exposes residents to other children/youth with varying pathologies (Crenson, 1998; New York Times, December/2007).

Proponents of orphanage care criticized the foster care system and the professionalization of child welfare services. They contended that the foster care system was not working as reflected in its poor outcomes for many children, and that "psychologizing" troubled youth leads to the youth viewing themselves as "sick and disturbed" (McLean, 1999, p19). In addition, potential cost savings were cited as well as the testimonies of former wards that attributed their personal successes to their experiences in institutional care (McLean, 1999; Murray, 2003; Smith, 1995). Others noted the absence of rigorous empirical study of the varied forms of 24-hour residential care (Gaskins, & Mastropieri, 2010; Whittaker, 2000; Wollins in Pecora, 2000).

Property saddled institutions had an additional motive for supporting a return to institutional care that was obscured by discussions about what was in the best interest of dependent children. De-institutionalization of the child welfare system left powerful property owning sectarian organizations with unused buildings and campuses or lacking the resources to maintain them. Dependent on a government funding system that links reimbursement to the actual days that a child is in care, underutilized institutions were forced to use their endowments or raise private funds to subsidize the costs of operating and maintaining their properties. Fewer children in institutional care meant less revenue. The Gingrich

proposal offered a financial solution to the issue of empty beds, a potentially more compelling factor than child-centered decision-making. It also provided an opportunity for re-examination of why (some) orphanages were effective for some children.[5] A 1994 study by the General Accounting Office (Pecora, et al, 2000, p.410) cites the limited knowledge about residential care programs and which kinds of treatment approaches work best, are effective over the long term or which youths are best served in residential care. Crenson (1998) noted that it is "*difficult to make a case for or against the orphanage in general. Children have different needs…and… orphanages were as variable as families*."

NYC's Child Welfare Discourse

Presently, there are only three organizations, Harlem Dowling-West Side Center for Children and Family Services[6], The Committee for Hispanic Children and Families and Community Counseling and Mediation Services, often called "minority" foster care agencies, founded specifically to serve "children of color" within a New York City (NYC) child welfare system in which over half of the 16,500 children in care are Black or Hispanic (NYC Children's Services, 2008). A

[5]Child welfare agencies in NYC are reimbursed on a per diem basis for the number of children in residence. AwoLs (children who are away without leave or permission), discharges, hospitalizations, out of agency transfers and the lack of placements, all diminish an agency's revenues. However, fixed costs and variable maintenance costs remain even when the census is down, creating financial hardship for property owning institutions.

6 Among the four "agencies of color" in NYC, Harlem Dowling-West Side Center for Children and Family Services (HDWC) traces its history to the founding of the Colored Orphan Asylum, (COA) the oldest institution serving Black children in this country. COA changed its name to Riverdale Children's Association in the 1940's when it began serving a small number of white children in response to city ordinances. In the 1970's RCA became the West Side Center, which merged with the younger Harlem Dowling in 1989, another agency created in 1969 specifically to serve for Black children.

fourth organization, Edwin Gould Services for Children and Family Services, whose chief executive is Black, self-identifies as one of the "agencies of color" although it was not founded specifically to serve children "of color." When the pilot of this study was initiated in 2004, there were three additional "child welfare agencies of color". In order to strengthen themselves individually and collectively, these seven organizations coalesced to form a partnership called Child Welfare Agencies of Color (CWAC) and secured funding to support infrastructure development. Despite the efforts, three of the agencies subsequently closed or lost their contracts to provide foster care (NY Times, 2007).

Some of the CWAC agencies operate Supportive Independent Living Programs (SILP)---small congregate care facilities for 2-4 youth age 17-21 who are transitioning out of foster care. The SILPs are small programs within the portfolio of child welfare and related services provided by these agencies. None of the CWAC members operate large residential programs.

NYC's child welfare system includes over 30 nonsectarian and sectarian organizations founded to serve specific populations e.g., Lutheran, Episcopalian, Catholic, Orthodox and Conservative Jewish, Protestant white children. Irrespective of their auspices, these organizations contract with the public agency, NYC Children's Services and receive public money that constitutes a significant portion of their operating budgets. As a result, they are legally obligated to serve all children[7]. During the 14 years that it took to reach the

7 A class action suit was filed against the private agencies and the City of New York with Shirley Wilder as the plaintiff in1979. Settlement took 20 years; however, the Wilder Settlement systematically changed the practice of exclusion of Black children from child welfare organizations receiving public funds (Bernstein, 2001).

Wilder Settlement in 1987---the class action lawsuit that challenged the constitutionality of exclusion of Black children by child welfare organizations receiving public money---the populations of the child welfare agencies in contract with NYC grew increasingly Black (Bernstein, 2001).

For the last 25 years, the majority of the children served by NYC agencies have been "children of color", disproportionately Black. The number of children in foster care fluctuated between 14,800 and 17,000 between 2005-2008. During this period, Blacks decreased from 29 to 27% of NYC's child population, but new foster care admissions of Black children ranged between 45 and 53.8%. Moreover, Black children were consistently 57% of the total number of children in care over the review period (October, 2009).

The change in NYC's foster care population to serving predominantly Black children led to discourse amongst policy makers, service providers and academicians, about whether there is value added to the field by sustaining "agencies of color". If all of the agencies are serving Black children, and most have predominantly Black populations, then is there a need for agencies specifically designed to serve this population?

In some ways, the discourse about child welfare agencies of color in NYC parallels the discourse that surrounded the passage of the Multi-ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) legislation in 1994, P.L. 103-382. In both instances the discourse included the role of race and culture in policy and planning for the care of dependent children of color. MEPA was intended to address the swelling number of the nation's foster care children by ensuring that children in foster care

were not deprived of quality adoptive homes solely based on racial/ethnic differences between the child and a qualified adoptive home. More specifically, the law addressed the concern that Black (and other children of color) might be denied a foster or adoptive placement when there were White families willing to care for them. MEPA established that race, color or national origin could not be a determining factor in a match of a child with an otherwise appropriate family. However, states are required to make diligent efforts to identify and recruit foster and adoptive parents of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds reflective of the children needing foster care placement in the respective states (Heifitz, 1994, http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/federal/index). In 1996 MEPA was amended by the Removal of Barriers to Interethnic Adoption Act (IEPA), P.L. 104-188 that included financial sanctions to states and other agencies receiving federal funds for delaying the placement of a child due race, color and national origin (Courtney, 1997; Heifitz, 1994; McGowan, 2005).

While acknowledging the need for more adoptive homes for Black children, the Association for Black Social Workers and others opposed MEPA and IEPA on the grounds that America continues to be race conscious, trans-racial adoption is “racial and cultural genocide”, (Merritt in Courtney, 1997). They stated that Black children could not be socialized for life as Blacks in America and would lose their cultural heritage if raised in White families (Chestang in Courtney, 1997, McRoy, 1999; National Association of Black Social Workers, 1994). Native Americans voiced a similar argument stating that their children’s relationship systems included the biological family and the kinship or communal

network (Mannes, 2005). Trans-racial adoption of Native American children resulted in the loss of tribal heritage and lineage and denied the rights of tribes to decide the fate of their children. The Native American "way of life" was legitimized with the passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act that establishes that tribal heritage must be considered as a factor in the foster care and adoptive placement of Native American children (Mannes, 2005). Thus, there is legal recognition of acculturation for this population of non-Caucasian children.

MEPA and IEPA legitimized trans-racial adoptions as a solution to the child welfare problem of disproportionately large numbers of children of color in foster care. Whether or not race and culture are relevant considerations in identifying a loving family for a dependent child creates lively discourse. However, in reality, the resulting trans-racial adoptions minimally impacted the number of Black and other children of color in care (Courtney, 1997).

Similarly, the merits of supporting and retaining Advocates for Black and Latino child welfare agencies argue that these agencies are interconnected with their communities and that cultural competency matters and is central to their policies and programs for dependent children of color. The leaders of these agencies contribute a different worldview than that of traditional White child welfare agencies, as reflected in the practice models employed in serving children and families. Rather than mirroring services developed for White children, the approach of these agencies reflects the worldview, culture, historical experiences, language and values of communities of color (ACS Task Force

Report on Minority Led Agencies, 2005; Giovannoni & Billingsley, 1972; Everett, 1991; Wilson, 1991).

A report from the Task Force on Minority-led Agencies convened by the Commissioner of NYC's Administration for Children's Services (2005) stated that the seven NYC "agencies of color" (now three) represented key segments of the child welfare population. The task force struggled with the notion of what constitutes an agency of color prior to arriving at the term, "Minority-led" and delineating the following characteristics in its findings: community as base, commitment to comprehensiveness; cultural competence, family orientation, empowerment of families and governance and professional leadership by People of Color." They identified the following distinctive features of Minority-Led Foster Care Agencies: greater than 50% Minority representation on the Board of Directors; a Minority Executive Director and top-level professional staff and a mission that explicitly states that it serves children and families of color. They also found that lacking the historical endowments and property ownership of many of the other foster care agencies, these agencies are vulnerable, as they tend to be under-resourced and overly dependent on public funds.

Many professionals in the NYC child welfare system publicly espouse a view that "agencies of color" bring an added dimension, i.e., "uniqueness" or distinctiveness to the cadre of non-profit providers of placement services (ACS, 2005). Nevertheless, "agencies of color" are frequently in a defensive posture about why they exist. As the child welfare system shrinks in response to ASFA regulations, reduced demand and shrinking resources place "agencies of color"

in direct competition for survival with traditional agencies with auspices outside of the Black and Latino communities. Some traditional agencies have the financial ability to replicate the service models developed by "agencies of color" and locate satellite offices in the host communities (ACS Task Force on Minority-Led Foster Care Agencies, 2005). Further, there has been no empirical study of the "uniqueness" of these agencies and whether it is relevant to the outcomes for those requiring out of home placement---Black and Hispanic children.

COA As An Exemplar of the "Uniqueness"

Given its history, COA/RCA is an exemplar of the "uniqueness" that "agencies of color" bring to child welfare. It was founded in response to the needs of Black children. Although it did not emanate from the Black community, the board of directors of COA diversified to include growing numbers of Blacks from the 1930's onward. COA staffing included Blacks throughout its history, including the prominent physician, Dr. James McCune Smith, who was the medical director for 25 years in the 19th century (From Cherry Street, 1936). Ironically, despite the thousands of Black children served by COA/RCA, it is referenced minimally in studies about the history of child welfare or discourse about current policy and practice development. Positive and negative data about RCA, and its practices and the experiences of its wards could add to knowledge about the history of child placement services for African American children.

This case study will explore what can be learned about how a commitment to serve Black children shaped the historical Colored Orphan Asylum (COA),

founded specifically for Black children. Its focuses on the pre- and immediately post-WW II period, a critical period in child welfare when the number of Black children needing placement began its steady acceleration to current levels. This study's significance lies in the prospect of adding to overall knowledge about child welfare history and more importantly the historical care of dependent Black children at a time when they were excluded from traditional White institutions. Further, given the increasing proportions of people of color within the United States, a case study of an institution founded for Black children provides the opportunity to examine how a retrospective look at an "agency of color" might have discursive value to planning for out-of-home care for Black and other non-White children as well.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A. Historical Background

Orphanages: A Solution To The Problem

Prior to the 1700's in this country, most young children who lost a parent(s) were generally cared for by the surviving parent or taken in by relatives or neighbors; older children were indentured to a master who would teach them a trade. In a society in which the welfare of a family depended on the contributions of all of its members, children were assets because they could provide additional labor resources to the household.

The Ursuline Sisters, a Catholic order of Nuns in New Orleans, founded the first orphanage in the United States in 1729. However, orphanages did not become commonplace until the first half of the 19th century (McGowan, 2005; Olasky, 1997; O'Neill Murray & Gesiriech, 2004), during the institutional era when institutions were developed to address many of society's concerns, i.e., aged, orphaned children, the disabled, etc. The influx of impoverished European immigrants, the growth of towns, epidemics such as cholera and the Civil War resulted in so many children needing care that communities were unable to absorb them (Lundberg, 1947).

In addition to providing physical care for the children, the founders of these institutions hoped to reduce the likelihood that their "wards" would grow up to become vagrants, thieves or other delinquents (McGowan, 2005, 'Schneider, 1969; Schreiber, 1965). It was the common belief that poverty led to vagrancy

and delinquency. In fact, frequently in the literature, discussions about child abuse and neglect, destitution and juvenile delinquency are interwoven. The first institution for young delinquents, the Society for Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents in NYC was opened because "*The greater part of the young convicts are the children of poor and abandoned parents and commence their career by street begging and petty pilfering*"(Lundberg, 1947).

By the early 20th century, there were over 1600 orphanages of varying sizes throughout the country, largely segregated by religion and race (Crenson, 1998; Folks, 1933; Folks, 1971; Lundberg, 1947). Many of the orphanages were founded by women although, men often served on Advisory Councils to the institutions. Managers (directors) provided hands on support in the daily operations of the organizations, serving as secretaries, teachers, etc. Churches and individual contributions covered most of the cost for caring for these children, with some local municipalities contributing as much as a third of the costs (Gorham, 1996; Olasky, 1997).

Another response to the problem of the over-population of the cities was the "placing out" of urban children from the mid-1800s to the early 20th century. Although adult men and women were also relocated, mostly children migrated from eastern cities to rural western and southern states on the "orphan trains". Over 200,000 children were sent to live with host families on farms and in small towns---a system that married the labor needs of those communities with the over-population of urban poor. Charles Loring Brace of New York City's Children's Aid Society is credited as the developer of the model for "placing out"

children in 1853 although the model was employed by other charities across the country. The practice fell into disuse in the 1920's as a result of public criticism of the practice and a growing professionalization of social services (Holt, 1992).

Dependent Black Children

In order to frame an analysis of the case of COA it is important to examine its beginnings and early history as well as the care of dependent Black children by other institutions. While COA and its successor organization are the oldest child welfare organization caring for Black children, COA was not the first solution to the issue of dependent Black children.

Prior to the Civil War, slavery served as the child welfare institution for Black children. Du Bois, (as cited in Billingsley and Giovannoni, 1972, 23) noted "*In Contrast with free white laborers, the Negroes were provided for by a certain primitive sort of old-age pension, job security, and sickness insurance; that is they must be supported in some fashion, when they were too old to work."* Black children were valued as property much like livestock. Their value was as present or future laborers, rather than human beings or even the property of their families. "*Children that are owned by a master tend to be used merely as means to the owner's ends, not as human beings whose lives are of value to themselves*" (Thurston, 1930).

The editor of the free publication distributed by the American Anti-Slavery Society, "The Slave's Friend" (1838)[8], laments the dehumanization of Negro children in an advertisement for lost property.

"*Property"*

Four little children who were slaves in Twiggs County, State of Georgia, were lately killed, by the falling of a bank in a gully, where they were a play...They were the property of a Mr. Solomons, whose loss by their death is estimated at fifteen hundred or two thousand dollars!"

In the early 1800's religious orders were beginning to respond to the needs of dependent white immigrant children however, Black children were equated only with their economic value. Even in New York where slavery was abolished in 1827, dependent Black children were excluded from orphanages for White children. Unlike poor dependent White children who could be cared for by orphanages when there were no familial or community alternatives the only options for orphaned or half-orphaned Black children was to be cared for in almshouses or by relatives or neighbors already struggling to survive financially. "Black people have always valued the idea of 'raisin' or 'bringing up' children as a vital collective concept and aspiration" (Wilson, 1978 as cited in Myers, 1988, 14). Although it was customary within the Black community for extended family or surrogate family to take care of dependent children, the elderly and the infirm, this additional responsibility further strained the functioning of these families. Despite willingness to care for the children of others, the added burden

[8] This issue was written two years after the founding of the Colored Orphan's Asylum. Slavery was abolished in New York in 1827 but was legal in the nation until 1863.

sometimes led these caretakers to pass the children from one caretaker to the next (Crensen, 1997; Folks, 1933; Schreiber, 1965).

By the first quarter of the 19th century there were three orphanages in existence for the care of White children in New York City. Yet, many Black children who were orphaned or half orphaned children ended up living on the streets. Poor children, including Blacks, who committed minor offences, were placed in the NY House of Refuge by the authorities (Gupta, 2001). The only alternative living environment was the squalor of the public almshouses set aside for the poor and mentally ill. Public almshouses provided minimal quarters for destitute white children and even more dismal provisions for Black children (From Cherry Street, 1936; Gupta, 2001; Leonard, 1956; Schreiber, 1965).

Of the 353 orphanages in the US in 1883, 68 admitted a few Black children while 276 totally excluded them. There were nine orphanages throughout the country created specifically for the care of African American children (Morton, 2000).

The Colored Orphan Asylum, (COA), in New York City [9] was founded in 1836 by Anna Shotwell, age 26 and her step-niece, Mary Murray, age 16. These two young women, members of the Society of Friends, a Protestant religious order commonly called Quakers, reportedly began the orphanage after coming across two "*dirty and unkempt*" "Negro" children on the steps of a dilapidated building on Cherry Street on the lower east side of Manhattan while they were

[9]The Colored Orphan Asylum was the common name for the institution that was officially incorporated in 1836 as the Association for the Benefit of Colored Children in New York. Its name was changed to the Colored Orphan Asylum and Association to Benefit Colored Children in the City of N.Y. in July 1884 in response to the abbreviated name more commonly used in bequests to the institution.

taking a walk in the spring of 1834. When they asked a Negro woman in the window above whether they were her children, they learned that the children were orphans. The Negro woman advised that she was caring for the children until the municipality came to move them. Out of their sense of Christian charity, the two Quaker women gave the Negro woman some money to buy clothes for the children and promised to visit them again. When they returned in a few days, they found that the woman had stretched the funds enabling her to care for six children, all of whom were well kept and in good humor. This incident inspired the Quaker women to protest against the municipal government, which had no provisions for the shelter of destitute Black children other than the almshouse or jail (Journal of Social Work, 1936; From Cherry Street, 1936).

> "*Amid the various charitable institutions with which our city abounds, the Colored Orphan appears to have been neglected until the autumn of 1836, when an attempt was made to extend some relief to this destitute part of our population, and resulted, at the close of the year, in the formation of an association for their relief*"(First Annual Report of COA, 1837 as cited in Leonard, 1956).

MISS ANNA M. SHOTWELL, co-founder of the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans, who served on the Board for more than thirty years, and was Secretary for twenty-eight of those years.

MISS MARY MURRAY, co-founder with Miss Shotwell, who served as Treasurer for the first seventeen years of the Association's existence.

MRS. HANNAH SHOTWELL MURRAY, a relative of the two co-founders, and one of the members of the original Board of Managers.

Figure 3. Photos courtesy of HDWC

The Colored Orphan Asylum was founded in 1836 just 27 years before the President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which proclaimed freedom for Blacks in states that were under the Confederation of States of America. Conditions were poor for all orphaned or abandoned children in the cities but excluded from white orphanages, dependent Black children were often left to beg on the streets or reside in almshouses with adult vagrants. These conditions fueled the commitment of COA founders to the plight of Black children.

> "*Colored orphan children are in many cases consigned to the charge of vicious and degraded persons who employ them in sweeping chimneys or more frequently begging and other modes of eking out a scanty subsistence*"[10],
>
> **Martha Codwise, & Anna Shotwell (1838)**

From Cherry Street to Green Pastures, (1936), which chronicles the first 100 years of COA, states that Shotwell and Murray raised money from their friends to support the care of these children. After 2 ½ years without success in their attempts to get the city to provide adequate care for these Negro children, Shotwell and Murray mobilized their friends and family members to develop an organization for the care of these orphaned Black children. Along with 16 other women and 5 male advisors, they formed the Association for the Benefit of Colored Children of New York in 1836. These managers and advisors came from prominent White Protestant families (not necessarily Quaker), some of

[10] As cited in 1932-33 COA Annual Report.

whose names are recognizable today, e.g., Mott, Jay, Roosevelt (mother of President Theodore Roosevelt), Ferris, Murray and Bowne.

The managers encountered considerable opposition in their efforts to locate a suitable facility to rent to house Black children. The Association ultimately purchased a house on 12th Street and 6th Avenue in Manhattan, which became the first home of the orphanage. It had a capacity for 50 children. The need for additional beds soon resulted in the institution outgrowing its facility. In 1842, the City of New York gave the Association twenty lots on 43rd Street and 5th Avenue, a location that at the time was outside of the central area of the city. The managers raised additional funds to construct a building and facilities that could house 150 children (From Cherry Street, 1936).

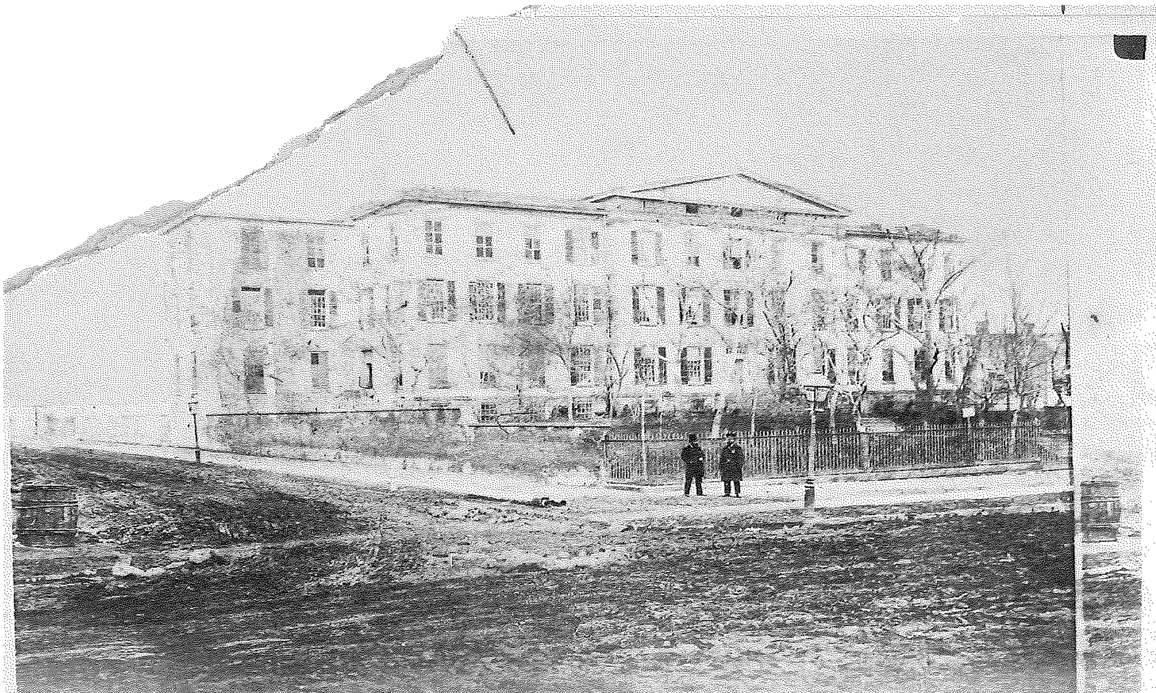

Figure 4. Photo of 43rd St. and 5th Ave. site of COA, courtesy of HDWC

Like most children in orphanages, many children at COA were not full orphans, but often half orphans or children left in their care because parents were too destitute to care for them [11]. Less than a third of the children were full orphans (Cunningham, 1989; Harris, 2003). Parents of half orphans were required to pay fifty cents per week for the care of their child.

Early in its history, COA developed criteria for acceptance of children to its care. Both male and female children were accepted between the ages of two and eight. Children could not be admitted before the age of two, due to the amount of care required for infants and rarely beyond the age of eight years. However, they were generally accepted by age eight to insure that their stay at the orphanage was long enough for the acculturation that would make them suitable for being indentured. After the practice of indenture was discontinued in the early 20th century, children were accepted at later ages (Leonard, 1956). Like children in other institutions with sectarian auspices, COA children were taught Protestantism and "*to read, write and cipher*". However, education was not limited to the "wards" of COA but extended to meet the broader needs of Black children living at home with their families. Much like the "child welfare agencies of color" in NYC today, COA was not wholly focused on caring for its inmates but responded to needs of Black children outside of the orphanage as well[12]. Children from outside the orphanage attended during the day and returned

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[11] Admissions records reveal that in some cases single parents, usually mothers would place the child in COA so that they could do live in work.

[12] These agencies provide a range of services such including health care, HIV/AIDS, family preservation, afterschool services, employment and training services, mental health, English as a Second Language, respite, etc. (Task Force Report on Minority-led Foster Care Agencies, 2005).

home at night. In fact, for many years, most of the public funding for COA was for education rather than for boarding the children (Cunningham, 1989; Leonard, 1956; Schreiber, 1965).

COA children had to master the basics before being indentured at age 12. Indenturing of children at age 12, so that they could learn a trade, was a common practice, not only for orphans or Black children (Cunningham, 1989; Schreiber, 1965). Mastering a trade enabled youth to support themselves and their families once they left the orphanage or reached adulthood. Alternatively, children could return to their parents at age 12 if the board payments were paid up, the parent was capable of caring for the child and the parent(s) did not want the child to be indentured. Although COA managers assumed responsibility for socializing the inmates in religion, morals, work ethic, etc. much like orphanages for White children, some of the children's parents played active roles in their children's lives (Harris, 2003). The parental responsibility and role in the child's life was reflected in the parent's role in decision making about indenture and in the parent's ongoing financial obligation to contribute to the care of their children.

Indentured children were placed with Christian families who were screened by a special committee of the board of managers. This committee also maintained responsibility for corresponding with the child and the indenturing family to insure the child's welfare. Some children returned to work at the orphanage after the end of their period of indenture. Throughout the history of the orphanage, some of the former orphans would return to their "*home*" with their wives, husbands and families. Others corresponded with the

managers, advising them of their wellbeing and inquiring about the orphanage, or expressing appreciation for the care provided them in the orphanage.

A common belief in the early 1800's was that African Americans were constitutionally frailer than Whites and thus more susceptible to illness when living in northern climates, a theory espoused by the first physician of COA, a volunteer, Dr. MacDonald. MacDonald advised the board of managers that neglectful conditions experienced by the children prior to admission contributed to their "*naturally feeble constitutions*". A high rate of recurrent illnesses and mortality among the orphans seemed to support the perceived frailty of the children, in spite of admission criteria that enabled managers to reject ill children from admittance to COA. In 1848, the board of managers discontinued the services of Dr. MacDonald and hired Dr. James McCune Smith, a Black physician. Smith served at COA for 25 years. The hiring of Dr. Smith bolstered the relationship of COA with the Black community (Harris, 2003). A middle school in Harlem bares his name today[13].

Dr. James McCune Smith

Dr. James McCune Smith challenged the characterization of Black children as "naturally feeble". Smith's early education was in the African Free Schools founded by the Manumission Society. He received his bachelor's and medical degrees in Glasgow, Scotland since he could not gain acceptance to American universities. Among his accomplishments, Dr. James McCune Smith

[13] McCune's granddaughter, a white woman, attended the institutions 175th anniversary celebration that with her son.

was the owner of a pharmacy in Manhattan and a founder of the National Medical Association, created because Blacks were excluded from the American Medical Association (Golden Freeman, 1966).

Respected for his reliance on statistics in disclaiming the popular belief in the innate inferiority of Blacks, Dr. Smith asserted that the ill health of the children was causally related to the environmental conditions under which the children lived prior to admission to COA and could be ameliorated with good care. He successfully petitioned the managers to make provisions for ill children rather than exclude them from admission.

At the time of Smith's hire, COA was located at 43rd Street and 5th Ave [14] and housed 150 children, having outgrown their former location. Dr. Smith's influential argument persuaded the managers to build a hospital for ill orphans, expanding the capacity of the orphanage to an additional 60 children. Built on the grounds of the existing institution, the new facility opened its doors in 1851 (Schreiber, 1965). Dr. Smith's ability to influence COA policy is of particular significance because of his clear identification with the causes affecting his race in his outside activities.

Dr. Smith was also a prominent and outspoken abolitionist[15]. He had a particular interest in Blacks developing higher-level skills that would ensure self-sufficiency and was a strong proponent of Black labor. The external activities of Dr. Smith in support of an Industrial School for Black Youth, founded by the Black

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[14] This location is one block from the current site of the main branch of the NYC Public Library

[15] Dr. Smith's prominence as a physician did not protect him from racial discrimination. In his first year of service to COA, it is reported that he had to walk seven miles daily to get to the orphanage because he was not permitted to ride the railroad. The second year he received a special dispensation from the rail company at the behest of the COA board of managers, allowing him to ride the train.

community were suggestive of different views about how to improve conditions for the Black race in contrast to those who advocated for training Blacks to be domestics. In a speech at the Colored National Convention in Rochester in 1853, on the creation of the Industrial School, Smith spoke about the role of Blacks in the "*battle*". Smith believed "*that one of the means of elevation (of the people) is an Industrial School and a plan by which our rising youth may rise above minimal employment for mechanical and mercantile occupation*s". He characterized the movement to create the school as "our own movement by our own means" (Smith, 1855, as cited in the Frederick Douglass Papers, 1, 3). It is possible that he influenced the continual enhancement of training in industrial and domestic trades provided at COA.

Smith's views on self-determination and the responsibility of Blacks for the future of the race were consistent with societal views about social responsibility in the late 19th century. Like other groups, African Americans shared the prevailing view that they "*were responsible for their own salvation*" as evidenced by the proliferation of Black charities throughout the country created to help the community's most vulnerable. Among Blacks there was a general spirit of responsibility for "*social uplift*" or mutual aid (O'Donnell, 1994).

McCune Smith's associates and activities outside of COA shed further light on the correlation between the larger socio-political arena in which the managers and advisors of COA existed and the philanthropic support of the institution's endeavors. Further, they suggest that the orphanage was integrally connected (though not officially through its charter or policies) to the larger issues

facing Blacks. Dr. Smith's relationship with white abolitionist, Gerritt Smith enabled him to secure a donation of 5,000 acres of land from the latter, which he presented to the board of managers on July 9, 1853 (National Medical Association Journal, 1895). This land was undoubtedly part of a parcel of 120,000 acres of land in the Adirondacks, in Essex County, New York that Gerritt Smith donated to Blacks willing to relocate and set up farms in the area.

Gerritt Smith's land grants enabled recipients to own their own properties, away from the degradation of the congested cities. More importantly land ownership met the $250 property ownership requirement for voting eligibility re-instated by New York law in 1846. Gerritt Smith's approach to elevating freed Blacks was to provide people with the means to participate more fully in democratic society. His donation to COA was intended to enable youth who had been indentured on farms to own their own property. Unfortunately, the remoteness of the community, known as Timbuctoo and the limited industrial opportunities resulted in few Blacks taking advantage of the proposition (Godine, 2001; National Medical Association Journal, 2003).

COA and Racial Politics

COA managers were careful to distance the institution from direct political activity in fear that the charitable work and public support of the institution would be jeopardized. This practice was reaffirmed in the following policy:

> "*All are convinced that the interests of the institution should not be endangered by mingling them with exciting topics; and feeling how much depended on the wisdom and discretion of the Managers, nothing has been done in their associated capacity, which referred to any other subject than the welfare of the orphans*." (Leonard, 1956, p5)

Discussions at meetings about religious or political issues were strictly prohibited (Schreiber, 1965). Yet in practice there was evidence of the managers' alignment with the Anti-Slavery movement. The early census included formerly enslaved children who migrated north as well as African and Caribbean children from the ships docking in New York (Harris, 2003). Many prominent abolitionists, like John Jacob Astor, Peter G. Stuyvesant, and Mrs. Dewitt Clinton, were supporters of COA. In 1850, COA received the residual funds from the dissolution of the Manumission Society, which supported the institution for many years prior (Schreiber, 1965)[16].

COA admission practices also reflected their general sentiments about slavery. Carefully documented records reflect the reason for the child's admission, vital statistics on the child and the parents, which included Black parents from the antebellum south. COA archives include a letter requesting admission and shelter for a slave girl from Curacao, West Indies indicative of the willingness of the managers of COA to shelter Black children escaping slavery.

John Jay, abolitionist and grandson of the jurist, John Jay, delivered an address at the 7th anniversary commemoration of COA at which he exalted the importance of the institution to "*elevating the condition of Black children*" by educating them and rescuing them from vice.

> "*And I now ask you if no relation exists between this Association and our large country...the seventy children now in this course of virtuous training were born in other scenes---were rescued from the haunts of*

[16]The Manumission Society, founded in 1785 to promote the abolition of slavery and led by abolitionist, John Jay, was the first organization in NYC to promote legislative action to end slavery. The Society is also noteworthy for its efforts to promote educational opportunities for African Americans (Harris, 2003; Schreiber, 1965).

wretchedness and vice in which they would have received a very different education…Another happy effect which this institution and others like it must have, is the kindly feeling it elicits on the part of the colored people toward ourselves...it is societies like this that are to counteract this baneful influence by touching their hearts with the refreshing balm of Christian consolation---by showing them that there are some who sympathize with their sorrows and who are anxious to elevate and improve their condition" (Jay, 1843).

Throughout much of its history, the benefactors of COA included affluent Whites. One patron of the orphanage, Dr. Beach, a botanic physician, generously offered the use of his country home, 10 miles north of the City for the summer recreation of the children of the orphanage. In correspondence to a friend, he notes the importance of providing support to this charity (The National Era, 1847). COA was largely reliant on the benevolence of Whites, however the orphanage also received in kind and monetary donations from the Black community. Goods such as clothing, bed linens, toys, etc. were routinely contributed from individuals, churches and organizations in the Black community (From Cherry Street, 1936).

The directors (managers) also scheduled regular opportunities for visitors to come to the orphanage, i.e., relatives of the children and patrons of the institution. These visits were prearranged so that they would not disrupt the operations of the orphanage (Leonard, 1956). On several occasions, the noted Black orator and anti-slavery activist, Frederick Douglass visited the orphanage at the behest of his friend, Dr. James McCune Smith. Despite COA policy which clearly stated that they not engage in religious or political issues (Schreiber, 1965), visits from Douglass and other known anti-slavery patrons would suggest

that COA was not entirely disconnected from the issues of the day affecting Blacks.

Black Children Outside of New York City

There were hundreds of Black charities in the US by the turn of the 20th century, a period that also included the largest growth in orphanages for all children. In the Black community the prevailing belief was that Blacks "*had to work out their own salvation in a hostile environment and that they must be unified in their efforts and racial elevation*" (Meier, A. as cited in O'Donnell, 1994, p20). Generally denied access to orphanages, old peoples homes, clinic and settlement houses serving whites, Blacks responded by developing their own institutions. The common theme was that of "social uplift", that by helping the community's most vulnerable members, the entire community is uplifted (Cunningham, 2002; O'Donnell, 1994; Peebles-Wilkins, 1995).

The first documented institution for the care of African American children was founded by the Society of Friends, in Philadelphia in 1822, 16 years prior to the incorporation of COA in New York. The Society founded several orphanages around the country for the care of colored children (Folks as cited in Giovannoni & Billingsley, 1972). The Philadelphia asylum, known as The Shelter, initially founded in 1822 to care for boys and girls, later evolved into a home for girls, then a training school after relocating to Cheney, Pa., adjacent to Cheney State University, an historically Black institution.

A review of the literature on two other major northern cities reflects both parallels and differences with the care of destitute Black children in New York.

Unlike New York, in both Chicago and Cleveland, Black children were initially accepted in sectarian orphanages along with white children. However, practices changed as the population of Blacks increased in these cities, relative to the percentage of the overall population. In both cities, the Black community responded by establishing small to mid-sized orphanages.

In 1899 the first formal orphanage in Chicago for Black children was founded by Amanda Berry, an African American evangelist. Like COA and other contemporary organizations, the institution was committed to caring for the children's physical and moral wellbeing. The organization struggled financially and closed after a fire in 1918 (O'Donnell, 1994).

There were several other small orphanages founded by Blacks in Chicago in the early 20th century. They were created out of necessity because the extended families could not meet all of the needs of Black children and mutual support systems were insufficient to respond to the growing need. Small in capacity, these orphanages tended to be less regimented than other orphanages of the day. The founders viewed their role as supplementing rather than substituting for the role of the family. Their focus was on preparing youth to be self-sufficient by teaching them industrial skills. Smaller orphanages required less funds for operations and they could more easily be supported by the benevolence of the Black community. Yet they typically failed because of persistent financial troubles due to the inability of struggling Black communities to fully sustain these efforts.

In 1919, social welfare leaders in Chicago created a special program to find homes for African American children, the Bureau for Dependent Colored Children. This segregated program operated out of the only Protestant child welfare agency and was funded by the Chicago Community Trust, a major private philanthropist, and other White individuals. The Bureau's focus included prevention of Black children coming in to care (an approach now called preventive or family preservation services). Its initial auxiliary board was comprised entirely of White businessmen. By 1923, there were unfulfilled financial pledges by auxiliary board members, followed by a shift in board composition to all African Americans. The Bureau struggled financially and was unable to keep pace with the growing demand for placements for Black children.

After three years, this pilot program, co-sponsored by the Protestant organization and the University of Chicago School of Social Work, became the public Department of Child Placing. The Department of Child Placing was the first permanently established agency for the care of African American children in Chicago. The Department of Child Placing, under-funded from its inception absolved the private agencies from serving the Black community. The public agency also had the adverse effect of taking away African American community control over the services delivered in their communities (O'Donnell, 1994).

The Virginia Industrial School founded by Jamie Porter Barrett in 1915, is a model of successful partnership between an African American founder, inter-racial philanthropists and the public sector. Porter Barrett founded the school out of a sense of mutual aid. However, like the founders of the Colored Orphan

Asylum, she was able to garner support from the Black community as well as the white philanthropic community. The success and longevity of Virginia Industrial is attributed to quality programming and the strategic approach of its founder to bridge the appeal of the organization to both Black and white donors. Now called the Barrett Learning Center, the program transferred to state operation in 1920, but maintained many of its core values (Peebles-Wilkins, 1995).

The Brooklyn Colored Orphan Asylum and COA

The experience of the Brooklyn Howard Colored Orphan Home (Howard COA), in New York, founded by African Americans, is similar to the Chicago orphanage founded by Amanda Berry. Howard COA, founded by General O. Howard and C. H. Howard in 1866, came out of the Black community and held a similar mission to COA. During its brief tenure, the orphanage received financial support from the community, most notably local churches and from individual donors. Donations from Black churches as far away as Philadelphia and Connecticut are reflected in the Howard COA annual reports. (17th Annual Report of the Brooklyn Howard Colored Orphan Asylum Society, 1885).

Unlike COA, the managers of the Howard Colored Orphan Home were African American. The institution was viewed as an institution developed by and belonging to the Black community. However, lacking strong inter-racial support, Brooklyn Howard Colored Orphan Home was unable to withstand the persistent financial struggles and closed its doors in 1918. Some of its wards were transferred to COA.

Black Community's Mixed Support of COA

Although COA had white Protestant auspices, it generally had the support of the Black community, with periodic tensions. One significant controversy centered on a bequest from a Mr. William Turpin). In its 100-year anniversary publication, COA indicates that Turpin left $500 "*to found a school for the Education and Welfare of the Descendants of Africa*" (From Cherry Street, 1936). In a letter written in 1837 to the Managers of the orphanage a group of prominent Black voiced opposition over the disbursement of this bequest. The letter contends that Turpin intended the funds in the amount of $6-8000 "*for the establishment of a Classical School…for the better education of colored yout*h" and that the funds were misappropriated when disbursed to COA. The writer further states that there were esteemed Blacks in the community who should have been consulted before the bequest was distributed (The Colored American, 1837).

From the outset, COA employed both Blacks and Whites. A Black woman served as the first matron and Black teachers were employed from the early years.

The Draft Riots of 1863

The famines of Ireland and Western Europe brought waves of immigrants to NYC from the 1830's to the 1860's. These new immigrants displaced Blacks who were employed in the most menial jobs in the city, reducing the availability of skilled and unskilled work for Blacks. These new immigrants lived in the same communities as the Blacks, at a subsistence level that was equal to or just above that of Blacks.

The advent of the Civil War and the requirement that Whites serve in the Union army heightened existing tensions between Irish immigrants and Black New Yorkers. Immigrants resented the obligation to fight in a war that would require that they leave their jobs and families behind to fight for the emancipation of a group with whom they competed for employment. The only way to avoid the draft was if one had sufficient money to pay someone else to serve in one's stead, a luxury for most (Cunningham, 1989).

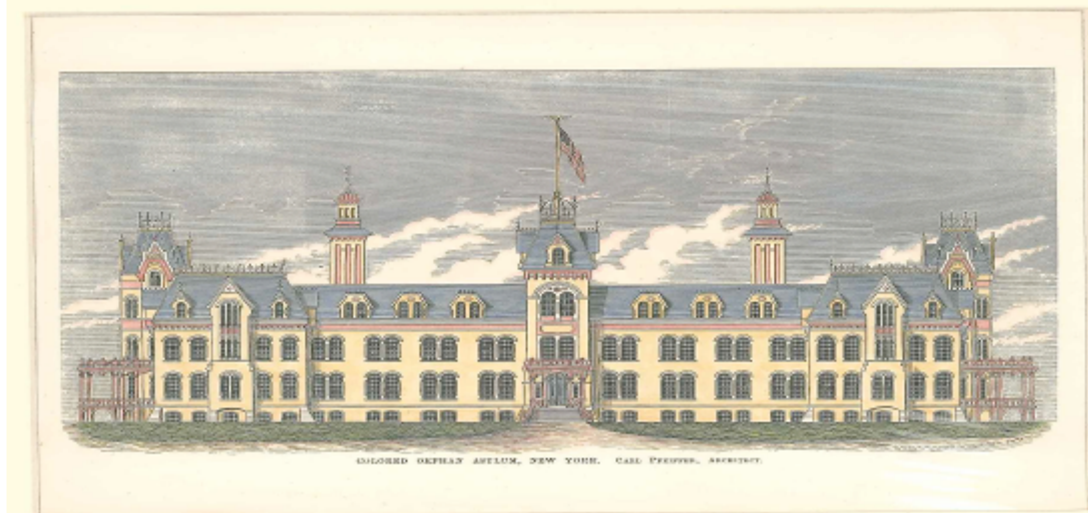
The Civil War was also a problem for White businessmen in New York whose export trade was dependent on the agricultural crops from the Southern states. They feared the loss of income from the uprooting of the social system in the South. The abolition of slavery would remove the free labor that contributed to the economy not only of the South but the northern cities as well (Cunningham, 1989).

These tensions erupted into the riots that broke out on NYC streets in 1863 in which the city was virtually destroyed by fire as angry mobs roamed the streets setting fire to homes and business. Black men and women and children were maimed and killed before the combined forces of the military, police and

fireman were able to quash the mobs. Before it ended, the angry mob burned to the ground the 43rd Street and 5th Avenue site of the Colored Orphan Asylum. Fortunately, the 233 inmates and the staff were led out the back to a safe hiding place but the building was destroyed (Leonard, 1956).

Figure 5. Harper's Weekly, July, 1863

Although the burning was a horrific and tragic event, the orphanage was able to recover. Blacks held a fair to raise money for the rebuilding of the orphanage.   The managers also received riot pay from the city and sold the 43rd Street lots enabling them to purchase land and rebuild in a more remote location on 143rd Street and 11th Avenues, where the institution was located until 1907 (Leonard, 1956).



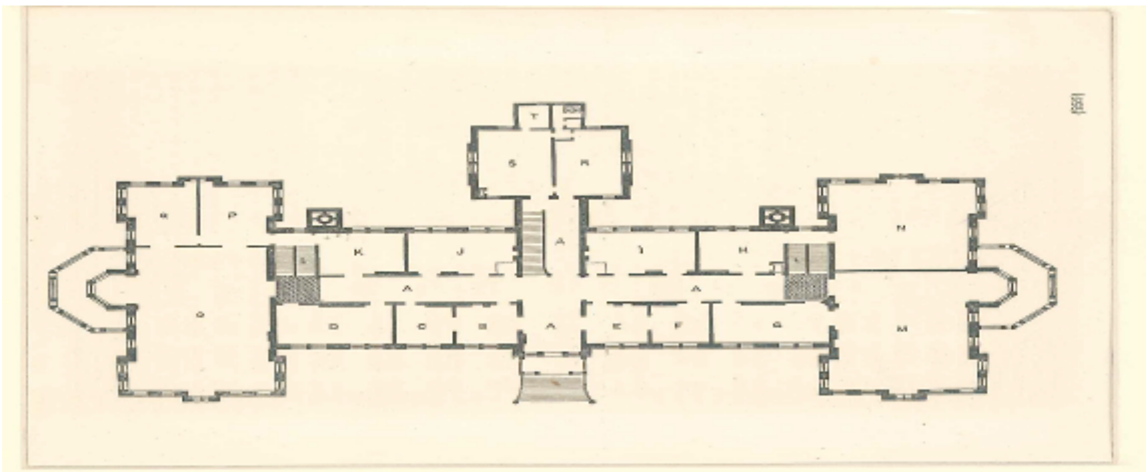


Figure 6. Architectural drawings of COA site on 143rd St. and 10th Ave. (Amsterdam Ave.)

The beginning of the 20th century was a relatively prosperous period for the orphanage, which had historically fluctuated in its revenues. For the first time, Managers did not have to solicit funds. Having outgrown the 143rd Street site the orphanage was relocated to the picturesque Riverdale-on-the-Hudson location that became the last site of the orphanage. This $500k property was

purchased with the proceeds from the sale of the earlier site, leaving additional reserve funds for operations.

COLORED ORPHAN ASYLUM BUYS JOHNSTON ESTATE

Dry Goods Man Lost Riverdale Country Home in Foreclosure.

ALLOWED TO LIVE IN STABLE

When He Died, However, He Was Buried in a Costly Mausoleum He Built in His Prosperous Days.

The Colored Orphan Asylum has bought a new site at Riverdale, consisting of the Robert Johnston property, a tract of about twenty acres, running through from Palisade Avenue to the Hudson River at about Two Hundred and Sixty-first Street, if continued. The purchase is the result of a recent decision on the part of the asylum's Trustees to move to cheaper land in the Bronx and dispose of their present site—the block bounded by Amsterdam Avenue and Broadway, One Hundred and Forty-third and One Hundred and Forty-fourth Streets, which has increased largely in value since the opening of the Subway.

The new site is a plot of nearly rectangular shape, having a frontage of about 800 feet on the river, and measuring about 1,200 feet from east to west. It is about 500 feet south of the Mount St. Vincent station on the New York Central, and adjoins the country seat of E. D. Randolph. It is sold to the asylum by the Central Trust Company, which acquired it under foreclosure last year, and is said to have been held at about $750,000. David Stewart, Stabler & Smith, and William Henry Folsom negotiated the deal.

This property was at one time the country seat of the late Robert Johnston, who was a member of the dry goods firm of J. & C. Johnston, at 787 Broadway, and later at Broadway and Twenty-second Street.

Followed by financial misfortunes, Mr. Johnston was unable to keep up the establishment, and finally gave the mortgage which ended in foreclosure. He continued to make the place his home, however, and even after it had actually passed out of his possession he would not abandon it, getting permission to occupy a room in the stable on the premises. There he died about six months ago, and, after having spent his last years in poverty, his body was placed in a costly mausoleum in Woodlawn Cemetery, which he had had constructed during the period of his prosperity.

Many offers have been made for the Colored Orphan Asylum's present holdings on Washington Heights by speculative syndicates and companies. None of these, it was stated yesterday on good authority, has yet been accepted, although now that the asylum has settled the question of where it will move, negotiations for the old site will be actively taken up. The institution is prepared to give possession of the Amsterdam Avenue end of its block, but will probably retain the land along Broadway on which its buildings stand while the new structures at Riverdale are being erected, or for another year at least.

Figure 7. New York Times, December 28, 1904

Until the depression of 1929, the institution was able to survive off of public board payments for the children and contributions from the many prominent New Yorkers who continued to support the institution. The spacious new grounds of the Riverdale facility included small cottages that housed groups of same sex children, a new trend in the care of dependent children. Cottages

with live-in staff provided a more family like atmosphere for the children (Leonard, 1956).

20th Century Care of Dependent Children

The first decade of the 20th century marked the beginning of several significant changes that contributed to the status of African American children in child welfare today. In 1909, President Theodore Roosevelt, whose mother had been one of the managers of COA for many years, convened a national conference on the status of children. The president declared in his remarks that "*Home life is the highest and finest product of civilization. Children should not be denied it except for urgent and compelling reasons*" (Roosevelt as cited in O'Donnell, 1994), in sharp contrast to the long-standing support of the institutional COA by the Roosevelt family. The implication was that the optimal environment for a child to grow up in was a family, which catalyzed a major shift in policy change regarding the care of dependent children. The White House conference punctuated a debate about the best way to care for dependent children that began before the turn of the century.

Following the President's proclamation, the child welfare system began its evolution towards foster boarding home becoming the preferred method of care for dependent children. The emerging viewpoint was that children should be cared for by families, although the most problematic children continued to receive care in institutions. Residential settings are still used in the child welfare, mental health, and juvenile justice systems. However, by the 1960's children who were

institutionalized were increasingly more troubled youth with emotional or physical challenges, while the “preferred” child was more readily placed in a family situation (Gaskins & Mastropieri, 2010).

The shift from orphanage (residential) care to boarding out was opposed in some regions by religious groups concerned about the lost opportunity to instill religious values in their charges. Some African Americans preferred institutional care of children because they did not view child welfare’s role as primarily providing a substitute family but rather as a resource for providing consistency and skills training (Leonard, 1956).

COA developed its first boarding out program in 1921 in Jamaica, NY---a Black community. Soon after, the program was relocated to another community with a large Black population, Harlem in Manhattan. The development of the boarding out program enabled the institution to accommodate more children by placing them with caretaking families who would receive pay rather than apprentice the children (COA Board Minutes, 9/1/36, Leonard, 1956).

The Effect of 20th and 21st Century Social Policy

As the country shifted from an agricultural to a manufacturing base, large numbers of Blacks migrated to the urban cities in search of employment. This migration often meant that families were separated as adults sought employment, removing the historical extended family support systems that helped in child rearing. The stress of the hardship of surviving in an urban environment and the lack of supports contributed to the inability of families to

sustain their children. In the 20th century new social policies at the federal and local levels provided financial support to needy families, but simultaneously increasing the likelihood that poor Black families, particularly single parent families, would have their children removed from their care (Morton, 1999; Hill, 2004, Roberts, 2002).

In 1935, the federal government passed the Social Security Act, which created Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). AFDC was intended to provide temporary or residual relief to single mothers in order to enable them to carry out the social reproduction responsibilities of rearing and socializing the future workforce, the children. Although the program was under state auspices, it was funded largely with federal money. Imbedded in the ideology of AFDC, was the notion of provision of aid to families based on inexplicit morality or suitability criteria, with out of wedlock childbirth considered "unsuitable" or "immoral" (Lawrence-Webb, 1997). Consequently 14,000 children were expelled from the Florida Welfare roles in 1950 and 23,000 children were expelled by Louisiana in 1960.

The Flemming Rule, a little known administrative ruling written in 1961 in response to AFDC was the impetus for the proliferation of African American children removed from their families and placed in out of home care throughout the country. The Flemming Rule established guidelines for the care of dependent children under the Social Security Act. It clarified that states could not leave children in homes that they determined to be "unsuitable" for aid, since children were dependent and not responsible for the actions of their parents

(largely single mothers). The fall-out was the increase in child placements of poor African American children born to single mothers (Lawrence-Webb, 1997). Even prior to the enactment of the Flemming Rule, cities such as New York were unable to care for growing number of dependent African American children. The population of COA doubled its census from 400 to almost 800 children between 1930 and 1934 due to the lack of other placement alternatives for Black children (Billingsley and Giovannoni, 1972). The facilities at the Riverdale institution started to decline prior to World War II and continued during the war years.

In 1942, NYC passed the Race Discrimination Ordinance which forbid any agency receiving public funds from refusing "*to accept a reasonable proportion of inmates from any racial group because of race or color provided that no institutions be required to accept persons from any race or group other than those who belong to its own religious faith*" (Billingsley & Giovannoni, 1972, 112,1). Ostensibly, this ordinance created more placement options for the growing population of African American children coming into the child welfare system. However, sectarian organizations circumvented this ordinance by excluding Black children who were not of their faith; only a few organizations opened their doors to Black children on a limited basis. Billingsley and Giovannoni, (1972) note the irony in the fact that COA responded to the ordinance by changing its policies and began accepting children who were not Black. This effectively reduced the number of beds available for Black

children.[17] This situation persisted until after the filing of the Wilder lawsuit in 1979 (Bernstein, 2001).

In the last two decades, several significant federal acts impacted the direction of child welfare and ultimately the disproportionate number of Black children in the child welfare system, the quality and variety of supports available to them. Increasingly conservative policies “scapegoat poor women and children and polarize the objectives of child protection and family preservation” (McGowan, 2000). For a broad overview of the federal legislation, see McGowan (2005).

A national focus on the disproportionate representation of Black children within the child welfare system includes analysis of the higher rate of child removal despite comparable economic and social factors, longer lengths of stay for children who are removed, lower rates of adoption and poorer outcomes for Black children who enter the child welfare system (Hill, 2006). Statewide and local efforts including those spearheaded by Casey Family Services, a foundation focused on child welfare, support varied approaches to address racial disparities at the front end (community supports for families and decision-making about placement), as well as the range of services, timeliness and modalities for improving outcomes for children who require placement (ACS, 2009; Hill, 2006, McRoy, 2005).

[17] In concert with this change, the institution changed its name to the Riverdale Children’s Association to reflect its location and its diversified population.

Residential Care

A review of the literature on residential care reflects that 10% of children/youth in foster care live in institutional settings; 6% in group care. The overall population served in congregate settings in the United States is increasingly older youth with average age of 13 (AFCARS 18 Report---Preliminary, 2010). Many are troubled youth with histories of multiple placements, diagnosed mental health conditions, illicit use of drugs and juvenile offenses (Gaskins & Mastropieri, 2010; Wall, Koch, Link & Graham, 2010). While the care of youth in residential settings is extremely costly relative to the number of children served, there is limited empirical knowledge of the effectiveness of models of care on outcomes for these children/youth, e.g., academic and social functioning, ability to live independently. Further there is concern that recidivism rates are high and that the association of youth with similar disorders in congregate care may serve to enhance dysfunctional behavior (Holstead, Dalton, Horne, & Lamond, 2010). A study of the Damar Project, a community based residential model, with inclusion of parents as team members and deployment of campus staff to support youth living in home-like community residences, reflected decreased lengths of stay, reduced rates of recidivism and significant behavioral improvements (Holstead, Dalton, et. al, 2010).

Research on the impact of a residential secondary school setting on academic performance of group home youth with serious emotional and behavioral issues supports the inclusion of these schools in the continuum of care for educationally disadvantaged youth. Gaskins & Mastropieri (2010) suggest "there are more factors impacting on the academic achievement of

these young people than behavioral, familial, and emotional issues that need further attention". They found that youth made significant gains over time in reading, math, writing and language fluency attributable to the impact of small class size, school attendance for many who were attending with regularity for the first time, the support of house parents and counselors. The findings are important given the relationship between academic achievement and success in adulthood and the importance of understanding the institutional factors that contribute to academic gains for this population.

A study of the satisfaction of youth in residential care in Australia, supported the value of eliciting the voices of children in care and noted the following recurring themes: the importance of feeling safe, being adequately supported and cared for, having a sense of comfort and normality where they are living, being provided with information, and being listened to and given a say in decisions related to their lives (Southwell & Fraser, 2010). The study addresses the importance of looking at varied sub-groups within a population---in this case age cohorts. It concludes that while their views are rarely represented in research "children and young people in alternative care have a critical perspective to offer on the effectiveness of the systems that provide care, accommodation and support to them".

COA

The limited scholarship on COA includes a case study of the early care provided to the "Negro Orphan" from 1836-1863 (Schreiber, 1965); a study of

philanthropic support for COA; (Sappol, 1990); an historical study of NY post slavery with a focus on COA practices and the alternating supportive and contentious relationship between COA and the Manumissionists (Harris, 2003), and an overview of the history of COA in the context of an analysis of child welfare history in general, and Black children specifically (Giovannoni and Billingsley, 1972; Smith, 2002). Seraile, 2011, chronicles the history of COA in the context of the support of the White women who provided support for the colored orphan population. In recent years, several fictional works have also portrayed the orphanage.

The film, “Gangs of New York” depicted the burning of the orphanage during the NYC Draft Riots in 1863. Baker (2002) prominently portrayed a fictionalized Black COA employee during the same mid 19th century period in his novel, Paradise Alley. Contributions from the institution’s archives were included in a New York Historical Society exhibit on the care of poor children in New York. In addition, Harlem Dowling-West Side Center contributed data on COA to contextualize the WWII period in the Australian novel Brother Fish (Courtenay, 2004). Fictional or academic study, there has been limited work that examines the experience of Black children who were cared for by this institution[18].

Child welfare literature includes only brief reference to COA or to other institutions founded to care for Black children (Billingsley & Giovanonni, 1967; Cunningham, 2002; O’Donnell, 1994; Lundberg, 1947; Olasky, 1997; O’Neill,

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[18]Barnes (1928) wrote an autobiography that includes his experiences in the orphanage during the mid-19th century. This unpublished autobiography describes daily activities and relationships among the children and between the children and their caretakers. Of note, was time that he spent in an apprenticeship at the home of one of the founders, Anna Shotwell This experience positively influenced his sense of self worth.

Murray & Gesiriech, 2004; Peebles-Wilkins, 1995; Saksena, 2006). Nor is the scholarship focused on identifying the essence of COA or any of the other institutions.

In his approach to the historical ethnographic study of the care in an orphanage for Orthodox Jewish Children, Goldstein (1996) provides some framework for exploration of the essence of COA. His use of narrative from former residents of the Rochester Jewish Children's Home is triangulated with data from historical documents. Like the proposed respondents for this inquiry on COA, Goldstein's respondents were elders. They provided rich narrative about how they experienced care in this orphanage founded for a specific religious/ethnic population that adds to knowledge about overall practice for dependent children. For example, the role of culture and religiosity on practice, policies, staffing, management and integration of the orphanage in the community was reflected in oral and written narrative.

This study also bears other similarities to the inquiry on COA. Goldstein lived near the orphanage as a child and played with its wards. This relationship was the catalyst for his interest in the study and also enabled him to engage potential informants. Similarly, this researcher has a history with the successor organization to COA, as its executive and had met many potential informants through the course of work at the organization. Although the Goldstein study focused on the experience of Jewish children in an organization with Jewish auspices, the research design and findings can inform this study of another ethnic population.

B. Theoretical Framework

Historiography is a research methodology in which the historian examines not just "events" or "facts" but how they are interpreted. Historiography provides an opportunity to re-visit an event "bringing to light the everyday lives of ordinary people" with a focus on perspectives previously excluded from historical construction (Danto, 2008). In social historiography, the researcher typically examines documents and records previously excluded from the depiction of an event bringing forth new perspectives. Using a post-modern approach, with its focus on deconstructing what is known, this historiographical study seeks to deconstruct the traditional history of the orphanage experience by adding the voices of Black children (now adults) in an institution created for their care.

Through an examination of the experiences of Black children and an institution with a mission of serving Black children---voices were added that have been largely excluded from other historical analyses. Three domains were explored as the focus of this historiographical inquiry--- identity formation, organizational identity and Afrocentric theory. Afrocentric theory provides an alternative worldview to the dominant Eurocentric worldview and is the overarching framework for this study. It is through this lens that this study will explore the organizational identity of COA in order to add to knowledge about how it shaped the personal identity of COA children. The following is a discussion of each of these frameworks and how they interface in this inquiry.

Self-Identity

Self- identity refers to a person's sense of who they are and what they can become. It is comprised of knowledge about one's past and the portent of one's future. Identity theory relates to the psychosocial processes central to all human development. The childrearing environment is an important factor in identity development for all children. A parent or caretaker, in this case COA, plays a key role in socializing a child and shaping the child's sense of self. A positive identity is fostered in an environment in which the child can derive a sense of pride in him/her self and realistic perceptions of oneself and the world (Erikson, 1968; May, 1976).

The socialization process includes teaching the child how he/she fits in the world (Winant, 2000). Although "a person is handed their family and ethnic environment at birth, his sense of self (identity), who he is, will then be determined by a complex interaction of forces that with age will vary in their impact and importance" (Chestang, p.45). "The individual judges himself (and who he is or will be) in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves" (Erikson, 1968). This would suggest that in American society with its history of slavery and oppression of Black people, in order for a Black child to develop a positive self identity, his/her development must be fostered in an environment that instills self pride while at the same time it socializes the child as to how his/her person fits and is viewed in the context of others. '"*How the child feels about his own body is an important aspect of racial prejudice. The issue becomes one of helping a child develop a*

positive person identity which, includes pride in who he is, what he looks like, his ethnic roots, and how he acts "(Cafferty & Chestang, 1976, p.45).

Ethnic identity, an important component of identity development has been found to be instrumental as a protective factor and related to better academic achievement among youth in foster care (White, et al, 2008). "*Ethnic socialization refers to the responsibility of African American parents to rearing children who are psychologically and physiologically healthy in a society where having Black skin and/or African features could lead to detrimental physical and psychological outcomes*" (Peters, 1981 as cited in Marshall, 1995). The ability to achieve good developmental outcomes despite adversity is the meat of resilience theory (Masten, 1998; Marsiglia, 2009).

If we concede that Black children face adversity as a consequence of their historical oppression in this society then, the sense of mastery and self worth in identity development must be fostered and nurtured by their childrearing environment (biological parent or other), equipped with protective factors, if they are to develop a positive sense of identity. The acculturation process must support the child's resilience in dealing with adversity that is stems from being Black in American society (Marsiglia, 2009).

Chestang (1972) states that in order to deal with feelings of powerlessness and social injustice in America, minority children evolve two aspects of character: the depreciative and the transcendent. The depreciative character evolves from the negative messages that the child receives from his/her interactions with the wider community. While, the transcendent character

incorporates the supportive or more validating messages children receive from family and the Black community.

Norton (1978) identifies two environments that contribute to character development: the sustaining and the nurturing environments. The sustaining environment is comprised of the people with whom one interacts and learns to deal with in society. The nurturing environment consists of family, friends and close associates at work or school who provide a sense of belonging and are the base of identity formation. Norton (1978) states that unlike the conditions for Whites, these environments are generally incongruent for minorities resulting in adjustment difficulties for these children.

COA children were not reared by their parents therefore the responsibility of identity formation, inclusive of ethnic identity, was ceded to the caretaking, childrearing institution. The domain of organizational identity enables us to examine the identity of this parental figure, the Colored Orphan Asylum.

Organizational Identity

Organizational identity (OI) is defined as the "core, distinctive, and enduring features unique to an organization" (Albert Whetten, 1985 as cited in Aust, 2004). "*Central*" or "*core*" refers to the essence of the organization. "*Distinctive*" refers to that which makes the organization different from others, while "*enduring*" references continuity over time. Baumer, (as cited in Corley, 2006) asserts that the concept of "enduring" is a misnomer, since OI may evolve over time. In a study of an organization post- merger, Margolis & Hansen found

that events could dramatically change an organization's identity. Further they proposed that the core aspects of an organization that form OI are its philosophy and purpose; that a change in either of these constitutes a change in organizational identity if the majority of the organization's members perceive it to be so (Margolis & Hansen, 2002).

Organizational identity is self-referential rather than defined by how the external world views the organization. In much the same way that ethnic identity addresses the question of *"Who am I?"* for an individual, OI is the shared identity that answers the question of "*Who are we*?" organizationally (Corley, Harquail, et al. 2006). This shared identity provides stability for the members of an organization and a basis for satisfaction (Margolis & Hansen, 2002). The locus of OI lies in "*the interpretation of external messages, messages exchanged internally within an organization, and how they shape 'Who' 'the organization is*" (Aust, 2004).

An organization's statement of purpose, philosophy and values is often articulated in its mission and values statements. Organizational identity shapes and is related to the organization's norms, beliefs and values and how these are reflected in the organization's communications (Margolis &Hansen, 2002). It addresses how those values are communicated in written and verbal message (Aust, 2004). Corporate culture is related to the concept of organizational identity. It refers to the patterns of belief or shared meanings that develop in an organization; culture that is reinforced through day-to-day rituals, language and

reinforced patterns (Morgan, 1997; Marsiglia, 2009). Culture is not ancillary rather it is the platform from which the organization does its work (Lundy, 2008).

In a study of the use of values by leadership in an organization, McDonald and Gandz found that an organization's values were largely shaped by its' leadership (1992 as cited in Aust, 2004). According to Margolis & Hansen (2002) organizations create individual links to employees, which emanate from the top but are "*created and made real in the middle and bottom of the organizatio*n" (p9). Within one organization there can be multiple identities, e.g., different divisions may manifest different identities. Within an institution, like COA with a school and a residential component, and later a boarding out program, there could be multiple organizational identities (Corley, 2004). The child reared in the institution is therefore shaped by his/her experiences interfacing with the institution's various components.

Afrocentric Worldview

"*Our worldview is the cultural lens through which we understand where we came from, where we are today and where we are going*," (Heavyrunner & Morris, 1997). One's view of the world shapes one's value and belief systems (Leslie, 1998; Meyers, 1988; Turner, 1991). If organizational leadership shapes the organizational identity then it suggests that the worldview of the leadership is a key domain of organizational identity. Worldview is therefore a key component of the value system of an organization. Over time organizations (groups) develop boundaries that define what is permissible and what is not permissible through encouragement or reinforcement, and conversely through discouragement of

unacceptable behaviors, beliefs, etc. (Marsiglia, 2009). An analysis of the relationship between the organizational identity of COA and the self-identity it engendered in its wards must therefore be viewed in the context of the worldview of COA leadership.

The Afrocentric worldview is an alternative lens to the dominant Eurocentric worldview. This perspective reflects a reclaiming of African principles associated with the African heritage of Blacks in America. It holds that there are many equally valuable perspectives from which to view the world, not only the dominant Eurocentric worldview. In his discussion of this alternative worldview, Everett (1991) echoed the statement in the 1933 White House Report that "a culturally based perspective is needed to grasp the intricacies and nuances of any racial minority group".

Three aspects of worldview are particularly relevant to this analysis: the perspective on the availability of resources, secondly, the relationship between individual, family and community and finally, view that "bad" is not an "intrinsic" aspect of people or behavior (Leslie, op cit.). In the Eurocentric worldview there is a limited availability of resources, the acquisition of which is a major focus. Conversely, the strong focus on spirituality in the Afrocentric worldview with its emphasis on a "oneness between spirit and matter", contributes to a belief in limitless resources. In a world in which resources are limitless, the "I" (or individual) becomes less significant as there is enough for all people.

The significance of "I" is exemplified by Descartean theory. In Descartean theorem, reflective of the hegemony of European worldview, a person's

perception is critical to reality, “I am therefore I exist”. The individual (“I”) and the nuclear family are central to this perspective. In the Afrocentric worldview the individual is intimately connected to the community therefore the “I” is only significant in relation to the community. Thus, the importance of personal accomplishment is valued within the context of how one’s accomplishments benefit the community.

In many African cultures there is a belief that an act is not inherently “good” or “bad”. What is significant is not the “goodness” or the “badness” of an action but rather how the action affects the wellbeing of a group. In this value system people or behavior are not intrinsically “bad”. Leslie (1998) studied how worldview is reflected in the values that African American mothers perceived themselves to communicate to their children when telling Brer Rabbit stories. While the sample size for this study was small (N=27) its suggests a “group” oriented value system in which behaviors considered to be “good” were those which are “intelligent and protective of the other”. An African proverb---“the bigger we are, the greater I am” reflects the interdependence of individual and community (Akbar, 1996; Everett, Chipungu & Leashore, 1991; Myers, L, 1988; Schiele, 2000; Turner, R., 1991). In the Afrocentric worldview, children are the collective responsibility of the entire community not just the nuclear family; their accomplishments or successes are valued in relation to the community as reflected in the African proverb, “it takes a village to raise a child”. In this study we will apply the Afrocentric lens to COA the organization to examine the extent

to which the organizational identity was consistent with the Afrocentric perspective.

Afrocentric Perspective and COA

Afrocentricity is readily identifiable in Harlem Dowling-West Side Center for Children and Family Services (HDWC), the successor organization to COA. People of African descent govern HDWC and it is headquartered within the Black community. The importance that the organization places on respecting the culture of its clients is reflected in its values statement and strong ties it maintains with the African American and Latino communities in which it operates. The interdependence of the individual and community permeates policy, hiring practices and the organization's internal and external relationships. Staff and clients may be neighbors or church congregants. Interconnectedness with the community is reflected both in the active involvement of agency staff and board in local civic activities and issues, hiring of former clients and others from the community and the impact of this involvement on agency policy, programs and practices.

Harlem Dowling-West Side Center, however, is distinctively different in many ways from the historical Colored Orphan Asylum. COA did not emanate from the Black community, nor would the founders have characterized the organization as Afrocentric. The governance of COA was historically White and although COA served Black children, its first site within a Black community was opened in Harlem in the 1930's. Although the population served remains

primarily Black children, policy shifts, time, relocations and mergers have all modified the organization.

However, not only was the mission of COA to care for Black children but a review of its early history suggests that there were areas of consistency between the value system of COA and the Afrocentric perspective. Principles associated with an Afrocentric worldview, e.g., openness to alternative worldviews, collective responsibility, the interdependence between the individual and community, spirituality and valuation of behaviors or events in the context of their impact on the collective, may have been embroidered into the fabric of COA fabric, elements that supported positive identity development for its wards.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This qualitative inquiry is a case study of the Colored Orphan Asylum. The case study approach is often used when a single case is of special interest in that it provides an opportunity to come to understand its particularity and complexity within important circumstances (Stake, 1995 as cited in Patton, 2003). The case study approach recognizes that a "case", e.g., COA, "is an integrated or bounded system comprised of working parts…that there are certain features within the system and other features outside of the system" (Stake, 1994, 236) all of which contribute to the uniqueness of RCA. I have chosen the case approach to depict COA as an exemplar of a child welfare institution founded for Black children. COA provides an opportunity to explore the essence of a single

institution that was created for Black children at a point in history when there were few Black children in placement in other institutions in New York and RCA was the only (and the oldest) institution created expressly for the care of Black children.

The inquiry is nested in critical theory, a paradigm in which it is assumed that "what can be known is inextricably intertwined with the interaction between a particular investigator and a particular object or group, thereby challenging the traditional distinction between ontology and epistemology" (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). Qualitative research, the methodological choice for this study reflects an "orientation towards exploration and discovery" (Patton, 2002, 55) that is consistent with studying a social setting about which there is little prior knowledge and therefore an absence of grounded theory. While quantitative inquiry aims to control study conditions…in order to measure a limited set of outcome variables, (Patton, 1002), the goal of qualitative research is to "look for patterns of interrelationship between many categories…which are isolated and defined during the process of research" (McCracken, 1988, 16). Its aim is to search for understanding of the whole picture by looking at relationships within a system or culture (Janesick, 1994, p. 212).

The driving question as to what makes RCA "unique" was addressed using three approaches. First, the question was addressed phenomenologically, an approach that assumes that "reality is socially constructed" (Berger and Luckmann as cited in Bogdan & Biklen, 1983, p32). Because there are "multiple ways of interpreting behavior", the reality of the RCA experience was determined

by the meaning given by the alumni to their experiences (p.32) triangulated with data from written sources.

Secondly, the study will explore the symbols related to identity formation and the interpretation and meanings ascribed to experiences and relationships which contribute to the essence of the institution's uniqueness (Van Maanan, 1983). It is anticipated that these symbols will emerge as respondents describe their interaction with staff, other alumni, and the larger community (Patton, 2002). These symbols could be reflected in some commonalities in the rich and detailed descriptions and anecdotes obtained from the respondents; that "common definitions or shared perspectives will surface derived from shared experiences, problems and background" (as RCACOA/COA children), (Bogdan & Biklen, 1983, p. 32). Again, the flexibility inherent in qualitative inquiry will enable the researcher to modify questions and probe more deeply as symbols and themes emerge.

Thirdly, the inquiry will explore the interaction between culture i.e., "what people do, what people know" and "the meanings people attribute to events" (p. 35). It is through this lens that the study will seek to unearth whether there was a sense of identity and connection to the African American community and if so how it was reflected in the practices and policies of COA, and how COA residents experienced that connection.

Using oral and written historical narrative this inquiry seeks to unearth data about the essence of COA by analyzing patterns reflected in archived documents, accessible to this researcher but not readily available to the general

public[19]. "*When research deals with stories, autobiographies or other personal reports, the inquiry takes on a more metaphoric complexion: the facts of the matter are often transformed into myths or sagas that lend a touch of drama, mystery, or heroism to the ordinary record of life* (Goldstein, 1996, p 191. In this inquiry I will explore the supposition that the essence of COA as an exemplar of a child welfare organization for Black children lies in the patterns of written and remembered decision making, programming and activities that constitute the story of COA.

My experience as Executive Director of Harlem Dowling leads me to anticipate that the ascribed meanings were consistent with an Afrocentric worldview, i.e., the values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that contribute towards positive identity development, success and survival as an African American. However, the Afrocentric theoretical lens does not preclude an inductive approach to this inquiry. Rather, the study was approached inductively to develop theory from the ground up, e.g., emergent from the described experiences of the participants without predetermining their points of view (Janesick, 1994; Patton, 2002).

The flexibility of qualitative inquiry allows for modification of the design to reflect unanticipated emergent themes. A naturalistic approach to this study allows for a design that "unfolds or emerges as fieldwork unfolds" (Patton, 2002, 44). That flexibility will lend itself to "the diversity of employing observations,

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[19] NYS Statute protects the privacy of children who were wards of the state by making their files unavailable to the public without their consent for 75 years (lifetime).

interviews, document analysis, historical research and constantly reframing the key areas of study" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1983, p.1).

Data Collection

The primary methodology utilized for this study was oral history through the use of a semi-structured interview guide. "The interview guide provides topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe and ask questions" (Patton, 2002, p. 343). The guide provides a basic structure for the interview process enabling the researcher to gather specified data from informants. At the same time it allows the flexibility to probe further to clarify or expand on emerging details during the interview process.

A secondary methodology for narrative data collection was group interviews or focus groups. A focus group conducted during the pilot study served as an arena for testing categories or interview questions that were later refined and refocused in the individual interview guide (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Further focus groups and future group interviews have been used for triangulation in conjunction with individual interviews, and written historical data, thereby adding to research validity (Denzin & Lincoln, 1989 as cited in Fontana & Frey). They provided a setting in which informants can expand their responses and thinking around issues discussed perhaps beyond what they might do without the catalyst of their peers. This methodology was only employed if the opportunity to collect data in a group setting occurs naturally for example at a reunion or a gathering in the home of one of the respondents.

Focus groups were used during a pilot study to gather information about prospective informants. In one of the two focus groups, the interview guide was tested. The second was a naturally occurring gathering during a planned reunion. These loosely structured focus groups provided opportunities to observe the interaction among alumni in a moderately obtrusive setting. Thirdly, primary and secondary data from archival documents, newspapers, journals, manuscripts, etc. were used to supplement and triangulate data from rich oral narrative.

Historical data was collected from primary sources such as documents, board minutes, records, correspondence and other archival sources. Secondary data sources will include newspapers, published and unpublished manuscripts, magazine and journal articles as well as other relevant literature sources. Much of this data is available in the archives of the successor organization, Harlem Dowling West Side Center, or archived in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (a research center of the New York City Public Library) or New York Historical Society. Some of the data at NY Historical Society is unavailable to the general public. However, by agreement with the Board of Directors of Harlem Dowling-West Side Center, this researcher has access to these files. Original records located within the agency have also been made available and were used by the researcher.

Primary attention was given to data that covers the seven years prior and up to the closure of the orphanage in 1946. This period includes the events which precipitated the closure of the orphanage i.e., WW II, NYC ordinance

requiring integration of publicly funded child caring institutions, the increase in Black children served by the child welfare system, and the expansion of foster boarding and group home care and devolution of the orphanage system. For illustrative purposes, written data was augmented by photographs, memorabilia, and rich narrative from alumni interviews, (or former students as they called themselves), that lived in the orphanage during the last years. Although alumni were the primary source of narrative data, this was supplemented by other written data or narrative from descendents or former staff as it presented itself.

Sampling

Three types of purposeful sampling were employed in the narrative inquiry---criterion sampling, critical case sampling and chain or snowball sampling. Criterion sampling requires the researcher to identify respondents that meet pre-established criterion consistent with the inquiry. Using these pre-established criterion as a base, it was anticipated that respondents served as links to other possible informants who could provide similar depth to the inquiry in a chain or snowball effect, i.e., one leading to the other or growing as a snowball does when rolling down a hill (Miles & Huberman in Weiss, 1998). For example, alumni who attended the first reunion co-hosted by Harlem Dowling and the Hebrew Home for the Aged, invited others to subsequent reunions enabling the identification of additional respondents. Two respondents traveled from southern states in order to attend reunion and to participate in the study while another

identified sibling of a NYC respondent invited, the researcher to visit his home in Georgia so that he could be interviewed[20].

Alumni informants were selected based on specific criterion i.e., race, period of residency in RCA/COA and their mental and physical ability to provide rich detail. All study respondents were Blacks, male or female, who shared the common experience of living in the institution during the period of the late 1930's to 1940's just before the orphanage closed. Due to the decreasing number of potential respondents due to age, study respondents included those who spent some time in foster care as long as they spent at least one year in the orphanage. Moreover, many of the younger respondents were subsequently discharged to foster care homes upon the orphanage's closure but the experience of foster care placement will not be included in this inquiry. This study excludes the experiences of White or other ethnic children at COA. This study will not focus on the experience of the COA alumni in their foster home placements after leaving the orphanage. The study respondents were males or females age 65 years and older, who were able to verbalize memories of the time spent there.

As informants were identified, critical cases were discovered that brought a perspective or information that dramatizes or exemplifies the phenomenon under study---the "uniqueness" of COA (Patton, 2002). For example, attention was given to locating respondents who were in the orphanage when the entire

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[20] Ironically, two out of state respondents who resided in COA at the same time, unknown to each other, live in close proximity. I was able to facilitate a connection between them.

population was Black, prior to the integration of White children, or ones whose experience includes only orphanage care, not foster care.

Some alumni maintain relationships with other alumni who did not attend earlier reunions. Just as participants in the first reunion identified other alumni, staff and relatives of alumni to invite to the second reunion, study informants served as a link to the identity of other potential respondents. Harlem Dowling-West Side Center was also a key source of study informants. A focus group was conducted in the pilot study consisting of 6 alumni and one former employee. A celebration of the 170th anniversary of the founding of COA attracted alumni, descendants and scholars associated with COA. Additionally, conversations with colleagues about the study resulted in the identification of descendants of former residents of COA. However, the size of the sample for this study was never predetermined but always contingent upon the availability of resources and the health and availability of surviving informants.

Potential respondents were contacted via letter, telephone or email. Initially outreach was made to known respondents via letter to apprise them of the study and to inform them that I would be contacting them. The letter also included a request for information about other former residents who might be respondents. Known respondents were asked to make the initial contact which were followed up by the researcher. The letter also advised them as to how to notify the researcher if they did not wish to be contacted again. All study respondents were apprised of the basis of the study, confidentiality of their responses and all signed consent forms as per CUNY IRB protocol. Interviews

were conducted in the respondent's home by the researcher, unless they choose an alternative location. Given the age of the respondents, home-based interviews were clearly the most convenient location. Most interviews were conducted in person, individually or in a group setting; they were held at Harlem Dowling, in the respondent's home or in the offices of this investigator dependent on convenience for the respondent. Two in-person interviews were conducted out-of-state, although the respondents were also interviewed at reunions held in NYC. Two other respondents were interviewed via telephone, although there were follow up interviews in person at a subsequent Harlem Dowling alumni reunion. For telephone interviews, the consent form was read and discussed with the respondent and oral consent obtained. The formal written consent form was completed in person or mailed to out of town study respondents in a stamped return envelope. There were 23 total respondents.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this inquiry is COA the institution. Although data was examined from multiple sources, the focus is on looking at the institution holistically. The voices of the alumni, historical narrative from primary and secondary archival sources enabled the study to include factual data as well as the ascribed meanings associated with those events and experiences.

This is an exploratory study that may lead to discoveries that suggest modification of the unit of analysis. As with other facets of the research design "the unit of analysis can be revisited as a result of discoveries that arise during

data collection" (Yin, 2003). Alternative or additional choices for units of analysis might have included the relatives of alumni, former staff, living board members, donors or other external stakeholders.

Guide Development

An interview guide was used in this inquiry because it provides a framework for "topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe and ask questions" (Patton, 2002, 343). The guide provides a basic structure for the interview process enabling the researcher to gather specified data from informants. At the same time it allows the flexibility to probe further to clarify or expand on emerging details during the interview process. McCracken (1988) describes several functions for the development of a questionnaire for the qualitative interview. First, the questionnaire ensured that the interview consistently covers "all of the same terrain in the same order". Secondly, scheduled prompts impose order and structure on the interview. Called "probes" by Patton (2002) these questions will deepen the response to a question by eliciting details, elaboration or clarification and channels the direction and scope of discourse, thereby enabling the interviewer to give full attention to the respondent (McCracken, 1988).

The guide for this inquiry was developed using open ended questions focused on routine and non-routine activities experienced in the orphanage, meanings associated with relationships with children and staff and the connection between the orphanage and the Black community (Attachment A).

The literature review provided a basis for the initial construction of the guide. In the early phases of the guide, questions tended to be dichotomous which can thwart in depth conversation. They often lacked clarity or included more than one concept in a single question. Past experiences with potential informants contributed to familiarity with some of the common language shared by alumni. For example, alumni referred to the institution as Riverdale Children's Association (RCA) preferring not to call it the Colored Orphan Asylum (COA), which they associated negatively with the use of the words "colored" (an out of use term for Blacks that now has negative connotations) and "asylum" which alumni identified with institutions for the mentally ill.

Early guides also included routine non-threatening questions to obtain background information. The literature reflects differences of opinion on the use of such background questions as an initial matter. According to McCracken (1988) background questions are minimally obtrusive and can be used to open the interview. These biographical questions serve to provide descriptive information about the respondent and serve to "cue the interviewer to the biographical realities that will inform the respondent's subsequent testimony" (p35). Conversely, Patton (2002) advised against beginning an interview with a long list of demographic questions. Rather, the interviewee should be engaged early on in providing descriptive information, an objective also shared by McCracken (1988) in his discussion of the need to move respondents to talk. Although none of the respondents in the pilot proved difficult to engage, background questions were eliminated from the guide. Reliant upon many years

of interviewing clients, staff, and others, I have found the informal rapport building discussions prior to the beginning of the interview to be fruitful for gathering background information. This may be supplemented by questions at the conclusion of the interview.

As the guide developed, questions were revised to ensure that they were grounded in the inquiry and "would allow respondents to tell their own story" (McCracken, 1988). Questions were developed which were neutral, i.e., empathic but objective. Further attention was given to the sequencing of questions and probes. Queries about meanings attributed to experiences will not be raised until after the informant has had the opportunity to recount the experience. Whyte (1988, p.102) states that "if we are to understand the shaping of attitudes then we must probe for reports of experiences". For example, in the interview, informants were asked to walk the interviewer through a day at the institution that they would classify as special or non-routine. Subsequently they were asked to describe what about the day made it special for them.

Feasibility

There are three factors which were considered that could impact the feasibility of this study: access to historical data, the increased age and infirmity of COA alumni and the impact of the perceived authority ascribed to the researcher's prior role as Executive Director of the successor organization to COA. Minimal problems are anticipated in accessing written historical data, given the writer's prior relationship with the successor organization. This relationship enables me

to access data in the library and the organization's archives that is not accessible to the general public. Some of the institution's documents are precluded from public view without the written authorization of the management of the successor organization. Additionally, some of the data stored on the premises of the agency may be difficult to retrieve or stored unsystematically.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle in this study was the ability to secure substantive oral narratives, which is subject to the continued health and accessibility of living alumni. Some previously identified respondents who participated in early reunions or focus groups had already passed away. The increasing age of the respondents creates a level of urgency to the need to collect data from them.

The third factor is the potentially coercive influence of my former role as Executive Director of the successor organization. During the pilot study, the potential authoritative impact of my former role was mitigated by my youth, (relative to the respondents), and status as a student. Alumni expressed support and apparent pride in my doctoral pursuit.

Human Subjects

The proposed study posed minimal risk to the respondents. It has been my experience that most of the study respondents were eager to tell their story and their experiences. Typically they have expressed a desire that their experiences, narratives and voice could somehow have an impact on how children are cared for in foster care today, to express their reminiscences about

their lives in the orphanage or to share their heritage with their children or grandchildren. For some who had painful experiences, the telling of their story seemed to be cathartic. Others have expressed support and pride that as a Black woman, I have chosen COA as the subject for my dissertation.

Enabling the respondents to select the environment for the interview provided an added level of control that would mitigate against any discomfort that they might feel in discussing sensitive information. Further they were advised of their right to stop the interview or to refrain from answering questions that cause them discomfort. They received no monetary reward for the interview. If any of the respondents evidenced physical or emotional distress during or as a result of the interview, they were provided with a list /or assisted in securing further support from a local health or mental health care provider.

Approval to study human subjects was granted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Graduate Center of the City University of NY in April 2006. Approval was requested at that time to enable the investigator to begin to collect narrative data in anticipation that potential subjects might be lost due to the aging process. Continued IRB approval was granted on September 22, 2008.

IV. FINDINGS

A. Outside: Socio-political Climate

From the early part of the century to the mid-1940's, there were three significant external factors that affected the Colored Orphan Asylum in interconnecting ways---growth in the Negro population; a new focus on race discrimination and World War II. Each in its own way presented challenges to the mission of the organization, ultimately altering its course. The organization's response to these issues provided insight into its corporate identity and how this contributed to the identity development of its wards.

Growth in NYC's Negro Population

Between 1910 and the 1930's, there was a "great migration" of 2 million Blacks from the rural South to the industrialized northern cities. Blacks came North escaping the resurgence of Jim Crow practices of segregation and lynching dormant during the Reconstruction period after the Civil War. They were also lured to the North in pursuit of jobs. As WWI signaled a decrease in the number of Eastern European immigrants, newly arriving Blacks found employment in unskilled labor in northern cities. In large numbers they migrated to New York City's Harlem community resulting in a concentration of Blacks that included not only ambitious laborers in search of a new life but also a new Black middle class comprised of more educated Blacks from the South and similarly

stratified Caribbean nations. A movement evolved driven by the “New Negro”, who with intellect and a new sense of racial pride challenged pervading racial stereotypes using art, music and literature as a new medium. Challenging patriarchal relationships between Whites and Blacks, this new force, later called the Harlem Renaissance aimed to “uplift” the Black race as it promoted progressive politics and racial and social integration (Lewis, 1979; Smith, 2002; Wilkerson, 2010). Reflective of that voice was the criticism launched against COA by W.E.B. Du Bois, editor of The Crisis, the official publication of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Du Bois admonished the COA board for the absence of Blacks in governance positions.

In “Angels of Mercy”, Seraile (2011) characterized the COA board as “racial chauvinists” as reflected in their willingness to hire Black staff to work for them in subservient roles but adding Blacks as directors only in response to criticism from prominent Black activists. Ironically, the response of the COA board to the NAACP criticism, i.e., consciously diversifying their governance body was a precedence that is still not common practice by 21st century child welfare organizations in NYC that serve a predominantly Black population. The absence of representation of the Black and Latino population in leadership roles prompted the development of four “minority” community based foster care agencies in the 1980’s and resonated in the discourse about the value of “minority” foster care agencies in the 1990’s[21].

In the first third of the 20th century Negroes were elected to political office

[21] The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is a grassroots civil rights organization founded in 1909 in response to the violence against Blacks that took place in the first decade of the 20th century.

in some Northern states although their representation was disproportionate to the number of Negro voters. Additionally, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Negroes to key government posts, e.g., Mary McLeod Bethune, Director of the Bureau of Negro Affairs, a bureau created to advise the federal government on policies affecting the Negro population. Locally, Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia opened the civil service and made several appointments of Negroes to judgeships, including Judge Delany[22] whose wife was appointed to the COA board of trustees in the late 1930's. However, there were still areas of the federal and city governments with policies discriminatory towards Blacks, e.g., housing (Myrdal, 2002). Private child caring agencies in New York City continued exclusionary practices until the 1979 filing of the Wilder class action lawsuit.

Increased Placement Demands

In the post WWI period, COA struggled to continue to respond to the needs of the growing number of dependent Negro children in New York City. Although both White and Black reproduction rates declined nationally during the early years of the Great Depression, the decline was not as great for Negroes. In NYC, by 1932 the Negro population in NYC increased 114.9% compared to a growth of 107% for whites. In 1938 there were more 4% Negro births than White even after adjusting for unrecorded births (Meyers, 1941).

High unemployment rates in Harlem, poverty and crowded housing conditions contributed to family stress. In 1932, COA served 1018 children as it

[22]Judge Hupert T. Delany was appointed to the NY City Domestic Relations Court by Mayor Fiorello Laguardia in 1942. A Republican, Judge Delany served until 1955 when he was denied reappointment by Mayor Robert Wagner. His family is the subject of an oral history about his sisters, which became an acclaimed Broadway play, entitled "Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters First 100 Years.

tried to respond to a growing crisis of unmet placement needs for Negro children (1933 Secretary's Report to the Board of Directors). Although a few other institutions placed small numbers of Negro children, COA cared for most. There was growing concern about the lack of available placements.

> *"We wish it were possible to admit more of the children from Harlem, who are so desperately in need of a place to go in order to tide over some maladjustment in their homes which the present over-crowded conditions bring about."*
>
> **COA Annual Report, 1929**

COA staff and board were actively involved in local and national discussion on the specific needs of the Black child and how to best serve the growing number of dependent children, particularly Black children. A delegate from the Board of Directors attended the White House Conference on Children and presented a report to the Board "*with especial interest in the children of minority groups*" (COA Board Minutes, 2/9/40).

In New York City, the availability of beds for dependent Negro children was a mounting concern. Despite a 1932 board decision not to accept children older than 12 years (COA Board Minutes, 5/19/32), the Board of Directors of COA reversed its policy in response to the NYC Department of Public Welfare request for placements for girls over 12, providing they send only "*normal girls and would pay for them*". A cottage was established for their care and it was decided "*they could be given special training in manual work*" (COA Board Minutes, 2/1/35).

In 1941, 89% of the placements of Negro children were made by 3 agencies of which COA was the largest (COA Board Minutes 3/14/41). The

pending closure of Wiltwyck[23], a school for boys and the Service Bureau for Negro children, led to concern for the "*care of about 500 dependent and neglected children*" and prompted a meeting of the executives of institutions caring for Negro children, members of the Federation of Protestant Welfare Council (COA Board Minutes 1/9/41). As a member organization of the Federation of Protestant Welfare Council[24], COA was responsive to the recommendations of a Federation study on the needs of Negro children that urged coordination between child caring agencies serving Negro children. The board agreed to work collaboratively with 3 other organizations (COA Board Minutes 7/23/41).

Space limitations hindered the ability to house more children in the institution. In 1921, COA initiated a boarding out program placing wards in the homes of families. Although this program was a great help in accommodating the need for placements, recruiting new foster boarding homes to keep pace with the demand was a continual challenge (1935 Secretary's Report to the Board). In addition the city's increased need for placements for babies and older adolescents presented a programmatic challenge as COA historically accepted admissions between age 2 and 12.

COA explored opportunities for collaboration with other Protestant agencies in their attempt to be responsive to New York City's needs, particularly for Black children. On May 26, 1943 a joint meeting of the trustees of COA and

[23] Wiltwyck ultimately closed in 1981 after being reorganized in 1942 with a board of directors that included former First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt. Mrs. Roosevelt's active fundraising for the institution contributed to its continuance

[24] Federation of Protest Welfare Council is now called the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies.

NY Child's Foster Home was convened to address the need for more cooperative collaboration. All of the agencies were challenged to stretch their resources to meet the city's needs. Mr. Murphy, Executive Secretary of COA advised the COA board that "*rather than taking a leadership role it would be much more advisable for a few agencies with similar aims and goals to think together about mutual problems*." Catholic and Jewish organizations provided care to the largest number of children citywide. However, with their Protestant colleagues, they were not meeting the city's need for foster homes for children with diverse demographics. Murphy observed that "*agencies (were) doing the same job they were originally organized to do without regard to changing conditions"* and that *"the Protestant child care community is 'not sufficiently organized as to garner enthusiastic support of good business leadership'; competing against each other for the same staff, foster homes, for 'nice' children*."

The merger was never consummated but the proposed partnership with New York Child would have capitalized on their respective expertise in serving infants and older children but with decreased administrative expenses. The new organization would have provided the capacity to serve over 1,000 Negro children. Mr. Murphy reported to the board on the efforts of Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia to address the issue.

> *"…Convened a meeting of representatives of child caring agencies asked to consider present placement emergency and to revise charters where necessary to accommodate placement needs*"
> **COA Board Minutes, October 15, 1943**

Is it a Rose by Any Other Name?

In 1942, citing the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, the Citywide Citizen's Committee on Harlem successfully influenced the NYC Board of Estimates to pass an amendment to the city budget requiring all agencies that accepted funding from the city for the care of dependent children, to accept all children of any race. Organized by Justice Justine Wise Polier[25] recently appointed to the Domestic Relations Court, and comprised of prominent African American civic leaders such as Judge Hubert Delaney (wife served as COA board member), Adam Clayton Powell Jr. and Jane Bolin, was the catalyst for the Race Discrimination Amendment, a ruling that influenced COA to change its admission (Rosner & Markowitz, 1997; COA Board Minutes, 1942-43).

The intent of the Race Discrimination Act was to increase placement options in private agencies for the growing number of dependent Negro children. However, most agencies were sectarian and could use race as a factor in their admissions policies. Consequently, the Race Discrimination Act had little impact on Jewish organizations and minimal impact on Catholic institutions, since most Negro children were Protestant. Ironically, the Act prompted the COA board to examine its mission driven practice of excluding White children from their care.

> "*We were asked to take C. Y., one of Father Divine's[26] followers, 12 year old 'white' and physically a man. As the case is marked 'white', we refused to take him.*"
>
> **COA Board Minutes, February 5, 1937**

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[25] Judge Justine Wise Polier was an activist and daughter of a prominent rabbi. She was the first female justice appointed to the New York court.

[26] Rev. Major Jealous Divine, better known as Father Divine was an African American spiritual leader from 1907 to his death in 1965. Father Divine founded the International Peace Mission Movement, based in Harlem. His congregation grew to become interracial and international. Many characterize his congregation as one of the first modern religious cults.

Apparently, fearing loss of funding, the COA board voted to accept dependent children of any race on the premise that doing so might serve to improve relationships between people of different races. The approval of this policy gave urgency to a two decade long board discussion about changing the organization's name…"*After an informal discussion of the policy of the institution, change of name...the meeting adjourned",* (Baxtor, Secretary pro tem, Board Minutes, 3/5/37). Deliberations were protracted and "decisions" reversed several times. Varied names honored founders, Murray and Shotwell, or reaffirmed their commitment to "Colored" children with sensitivity to the preferred name of "Negro". On December 13, 1940, the Board voted on proposed names "Negro Children's Association", (5); "Association for Negro Children", (5); "Murray Shotwell Center" (6) and on February 14, 1941 approved a change of name to "Murray Shotwell Association".

> *"The Executive Committee came to the board meeting prepared to propose a name in place of the "Murray Shotwell Association" previously approved but due to the recent passage of the Race discrimination Amendment, it seems wise to defer change of name."*
>
> **COA Board Minutes, May 8, 1942**

The organizational name discourse that preceded the Race Discrimination Act focused on recognition of the organization's founders or the social acceptability of the terms "colored" and "asylum". Following the Act, the discourse broadened to selection of a name that reflected receptivity to placement of all children not just Black children, as indicated by the Board's endorsement of the measure passed by the NYC Board of Estimate.

> “*The Board of the Colored Orphan Asylum approves the recent amendment, which was passed by the Board of Estimate of New York city, whereby institutions receiving city money for the care of public wards, must cease to show discrimination as to the race or color in their intake. While it is unfortunate that the Board of Estimate found it necessary to force the amendment through, it is in theory a move in the right direction.”*
>
> **COA Board Minutes, May 8, 1942**

In spite of this endorsement, COA did not move forward with haste to diversify its population. Extended deliberations about the choice for a new name became a metaphor for the identity change facing the organization. The board included consideration of proposed names *“NY Children’s Bureau”* and *“Riverdale Children’s Association”* conjointly with other charter changes addressing governance and admissions policies (COA Board Minutes, 3/12/43). The affirmative vote to amend the charter to enable the agency to broaden the characteristics of children it could serve to “*any child in need*” was thwarted by concern that COA would move away from their primary mission. Extended deliberations about the ramifications of the impact of serving non-Black children ultimately led to admonishment by the courts. Secretary Murphy made the following report to the board on March 12, 1943:

> *“Judge Bolin raised questions as to why we have not changed our name and why we are not taking White children. However, there was grave question in our minds as to whether we should take White children while Negro children are still uncared for, in view of the fact that there is very active program under the direction of the Federation of Protestant Welfare Council which is studying ways and means of best meeting the total Protestant child care needs.”*
>
> **COA Board Minutes March 12, 1943**

Although some of the other child caring agencies increased the

placements available to Black children, selectivity based on criteria such as age, gender, severity of child's mental or social issues, and most significantly religion was prevalent until the 1972 filing of the Wilder vs. Sugarman Class Action Lawsuit[27]. Since most Black children were Protestant, organizations with Catholic and Jewish auspices could continue to exclude Black children if they were not of their faith. Ironically, as others maintained their selectivity in populations served, COA began to dilute its focus on placements for Black children, further reducing the availability of placements for the growing number of Black children being admitted. In November 1944 there were 400 Negro children awaiting placement with the Department of Welfare and 100 through the courts. The city proposed to take some children into their own care (COA Board Minutes, 11/3/44). Fear of lost City funding may have been the precipitating factor in the COA decision to place White children; however, the directive was consistent with the institution's philosophical beliefs reaffirmed in the following resolution:

> *"The changes, which may ensue, such as placing together children of different color or race, may cause some unhappiness. But this cannot be a consideration, since in any great forward movement for the betterment of human relations there must necessarily be a period of re-adjustment, which (sic) may cause unhappiness to certain individuals. But if we are to attain the ideals toward which we are striving, if we are to bring to this earth the Brotherhood of man, we must carry our share of responsibility in bringing together the peoples of all races that they may live in peace and harmony together on the earth".*
>
> **COA Board Minutes, May 8, 1942**

[27] A class action suit was filed against the private agencies and the City of New York with Shirley Wilder as the plaintiff in 1979. Resolution of the case took 20 years; however, the Wilder Settlement systematically changed the practice of exclusion of Black children from child welfare organizations receiving public funds and the consequent denial of needed services to Black children (Bernstein, 2001).

Acceptance of White children necessitated freeing up space in the already filled and understaffed institution. Re-allocations of cottages were made to accommodate additional children. Five Black boys and five Black girls were, all younger children, were shifted out of the orphanage to boarding homes. The board directed the staff to only accept White placements to the orphanage until all vacancies were filled. Recognizing that this change would impact the public view of COA, the board concurrently launched a publicity campaign.

> *"Be it resolved, that the staff is herewith instructed to make preparation for the reception of children of any race or color on a sound casework basis…(trustees will assume) the obligation imposed on them of carrying on in the community an educational interpretive job."*
>
> **COA Board Minutes, April 14, 1944**

Admissions of both Black and White children were permitted to boarding homes based on availability. A campaign was launched to recruit homes for White children in the boarding-out program. The board reconciled this diversion from its historical work as it made the decision to "*prepare to sacrifice a few Negro children, principally at intake but possibly already in care, in order to get this program underway. (This initiative) might be a stimulus to White agencies to accelerate placement of Negro children* (COA Board Minutes 6/9/44). Its stated long term plan was to make the Riverdale site "*a school for those boys who were unable to make community adjustment in a foster home...where such placement was hopeless or unprofitable for the child*" (COA Board Minutes, 6/9/44)

The selection of a new name for COA was embraced by the Publicity

Committee, responsible for marketing and fundraising, as an opportunity for garnering public attention. Children within the institution were invited to submit names for selection by the committee. In all, there were 300 entries for the naming contest apparently with some coaching by staff. The "*unanimous choice was Riverdale Children's Association*", submitted by Fitz Harvey, one of the boys at Riverdale (COA Board Minutes 2/11/44). The new name, Riverdale Children's Association, was announced officially by Mayor LaGuardia, who made a presentation to the contest winner (COA Board Minutes, April 14, 1944).[28]

Several other significant events occurred at the December 11, 1944 meeting: The Male Board of Advisors was officially discontinued and the slate of new officers was introduced, with Mrs. Robert De Vecchi as President. Mr. Henry R. Murphy, the Director, was also given a board seat, Second Assistant Treasurer. It was under Mrs. De Vecchi's leadership that the Riverdale site was closed.

On January 12, 1945 (COA Board Minutes), Mr. Murphy reported to the Executive Committee that there were 542 children under care and that the "*first two white children are already at the Institution; four are under study for foster homes.*"

> *"They brought in white students from Russia. I remember it being in the beginning of the 1940's."*
>
> **Mr. Clark[29]**

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[28] See Appendix B.

[29] Mr. Clark entered COA at age 11, along with his brother who he always protected because "he couldn't fight". Mr. C. says that he was always a leader, influencing others to stay in school, tutoring them and helping them with homework. He developed many relationships that persisted for years after he left but he didn't start talking about being an orphan until he was 50 years old. He never told his wife or children because he didn't think they needed to know. His illustrious adult accomplishments included obtaining

One former ward remembers all of the children being treated as equals consistent with the Board resolution accepting the Board of Estimate's racial discrimination amendment.

> *"The workers there, all of the staff, you were accepted for who you were; not because you were Black, because you were White*."
> **Mrs. W.**[30]

Although the staff complied with the Board's directive to admit White children, there were external obstacles to compliance by COA with the Board of Estimate ruling. Not everyone thought that White children should receive services from COA. There were judges who refused to place White children with COA.

At the March 7, 1945 board meeting, Murphy informed the board about a "*neglect case of 3 White children in Queens in which one child was referred to Riverdale by the Probation Department, and the Judge refused to remand the child to us giving no definite reason. It was understood that the Judge made a statement indicating a 'prejudiced point of view*'". Consistent with the historical policy of the COA Board to prohibit discussion of religion or politics (Schreiber, 1965) the board empowered Mr. Murphy to covertly investigate the matter. Later

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multiple post-graduate degrees, teaching, acting and writing. According to Mr. C., he was the last of the youth to leave the COA campus.

[30] Mrs. W. is short in stature with a dark complexion. She is bright, chatty and speaks with a staccato voice. This manic pattern is also reflected in her expressive and fluid writing. If others were not so vocal, she could easily monopolize group discussion. There is a pixie, girl like manner to her movements, affect and speech. Mrs. W. dresses with tasteful flair. Late in life, she expanded her academic horizons. Mrs. W. holds an advanced theological degree. She is widowed from her marriage to another COA alumnus. Mrs. W. was very proud that one of her six adult children accompanied her to the COA symposium where she was one of the panelists.

when the same judge failed to remand a White child to the institution, Murphy "*reported the facts to the Citywide Committee who will (sic) address the issue with the help of several judges and will keep 'our' name out of the proceedings*" (COA Board Minutes, March 7, 1945).

Mrs. R. DeVecchi, far left; photo courtesy of Harlem Dowling-West Side Center

World War II

> "*I remember, I came out of church one Sunday, and the cottage father said, "They attacked Pearl Harbor!" It was 1941.*"
>
> **Mr. Floyd**[31]

[31] Mr. Floyd, an avid cyclist is a spry, wiry man. When I initially met him at a reunion, Mr. F. had ridden his bicycle from his Newark home to the reunion on the Riverdale site (now the property of the Hebrew Home for the Aged). The prior day Mr. F. participated in a 32 mile ride. Aside from the health benefits, cycling undoubtedly helped to channel his frenetic energy. In his early seventies at the time, Mr. F. was younger than most respondents. A lively and playful man, he was often the center of attention and laughter.

A third factor, overarching the issues of population growth and the renewed focus on race discrimination both of which were directly related to Blacks, was the advent of the World War II, which affected all American life. WW II lasted from 1939-1945 and paralleled the waning years of the COA orphanage. The advent of the war further compounded the ability of COA to respond to the City's placement needs. This global conflict impacted former COA children as well as its current wards, staffing, fundraising and ultimately contributed to the closing of the orphanage.

Staff recruitment was difficult during the war years. This was not only true for COA but for all of the child caring institutions. Staff shortages further compounded the lack of placements for Negro children.

> "*With the exception of COA all other Negro child care agencies have closed intake or are only admitting re-placements…the number of children was no longer an issue as much as the need for additional staff.*"
>
> **COA Board Minutes, July 26,1940**

Prospective and existing staff opted for war service in the military or in higher paying opportunities in war related employment. Efforts to secure male workers who were conscientious objectors "*failed as all are [sic] being used for farm service"* (COA Board Minutes, 5/14/43) and the Civil Service produced new clerical opportunities for women (Board Minutes, 1/8/43). Acute staffing challenges in all of the institutions prompted involvement of the War Manpower Commission "*to put on a drive to recruit for these agencies*"(COA Board Minutes, 3/9/45).

Although hiring was difficult, there were other positive outcomes for COA

due to the war. WW II served as a rallying point and an opportunity to teach and model citizenship, self-sufficiency and collective responsibility for the children of COA. In 1943, the children raised money for a war bond that they presented to Mrs. Franklin D. (Eleanor) Roosevelt.

Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt with Riverdale children during presentation of war bond purchased by the children in memory of Riverdale boys killed in WWII. (Courtesy of Mr. F.)

Addresses were compiled of COA people in the military--- 91"old boys"; 3 staff members and 4 foster fathers (COA Board Minutes, 9/8/44). Children raised money and collected Christmas gifts for "old boys", former COA residents enlisted in the military. "*Board members and staff responded to an appeal to supplement money raised by the children for Christmas gifts for COA boys now in service*" under the leadership of Negro board member, Mrs. Hubert Delany, wife of Judge Delany (COA Board Minutes, 9/17/43).

COA children also wrote letters to former boys, and the children, staff and

board received correspondence from boys in the military. Some former boys spent their military leave at the institution. In a letter read to the board of directors by Mr. Murphy, COA Executive Secretary at a board meeting advised that Elmer J. "*expressed great enthusiasm over a week's visit 'home' while on furlough having just completed service school training in the Great Lakes*" (Board Minutes, 5/26/43).

As a whole, COA supported and celebrated its boys in the military and mourned those who were lost, individually and collectively. Children included boys in the military in their prayers. In his report to the Board, Mr. Murphy, advised the board about how "*much personal work we do keeping in touch with them* (boys in the military), *how much they depend on us and how close are their ties with us [sic]* " as he brought news of *"the death of a former Riverdale boy, Byron Marshall*", one of many killed while serving in the armed forces in WW II (April 13, 1945)[32].

COA alumni speak with pride about COA boys that were in the Navy, Army and the Air Force. But, even in a time of war they felt the pangs of race discrimination in America.

> "*The Japanese asked Sammy, (brother of Mrs. Bernard), what he was fighting for since they (White Americans) don't treat you right; (they won't) put you in charge of Whites.*"
>
> **Mrs. Timmons** [33]

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[32] See appendix C for deed for burial plot in Kensico Cemetary purchased in 1901 for COA deceased. The last former resident was buried there in 1961.

[33] Mrs. Timmons was the only girl and oldest of three siblings; the youngest was Mr. E. According to Mrs. T., all were placed in COA in 1935 because they were living with their father and there was no woman in the home to care for them. Mrs. T recalls her mother's mental illness; she took her 3 children to the Third Avenue Bridge and told them to jump. The children maintained a relationship with their mother until her death, although she spent most of her life in long-term psychiatric care. A widow, Mrs. T. is a retired

The participation of COA in the war effort went beyond support of its boys in the armed forces. Modeling collective responsibility and fulfilling their civic duty, air raid drills were held routinely and "*16 workers registered as air raid wardens"* (Board Minutes, December 12, 1941). As a supplement to staff shortages, a Work Progress Administration (WPA)[34] music instructor continued the COA music program and "*conducted a successful music festival*" (Board Minutes, 7/11/41).

Mirroring the institution's early history when its founders accepted escaping slave children from Curacao into the orphanage's sanctuary[35] and 20th century placements of half-Native American children,[36] the COA Board extended its reach to dependent Negro children who were victims of WWII. The Board approved a motion to "*care for Negro refugee children who may come to the*

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government worker who maintains a very close relationship with her children and grandchildren. Her comfortable and spacious apartment is abundant with photographs of her family.

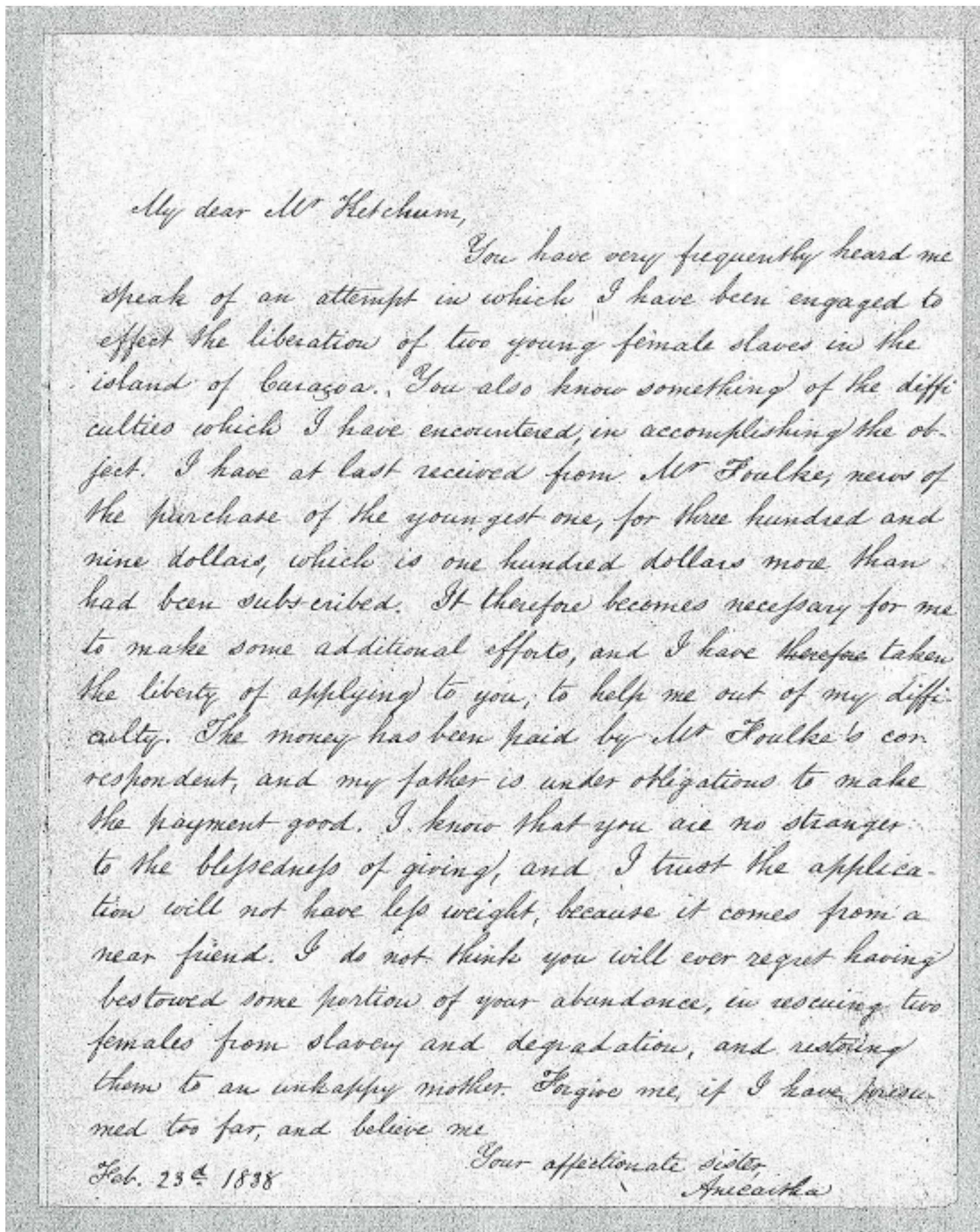
[34] The Work Progress Administration (WPA) was created in 1936 by the federal government employing millions of people to carry out public works in communities across the country.

[35] See Appendix C.

[36]The two S. children were examples of COA children with part Shinnecock heritage. Mr. S, b. 1889, now deceased, and his sister were placed in COA in 1896. At that time, COA was located in farm country in what is now Amsterdam Avenue in West Harlem, Ms. S's daughter states that her grandmother was from the Shinnecock tribe and her grandfather was Black. According to Ms. S., her father spoke little of his time at COA or his Native American heritage. She describes her father as having a quiet manner, brown complexioned with "Native American nose and straight hair". Ms. S. quotes her father as saying it was "hard enough being a 'nigger' in this country, I don't want to talk about the Indian stuff". Ms. S's mother was her father's second marriage; her mother was significantly younger. He had children from both marriages. Mr. S. lived most of his adult life in Harlem, and was a long distance runner for St. Phillip's Church in Harlem, a long supporter of COA. Mr. S. was part of a corps of Negro runners, mainly from St. Phillip's invited to run for the New York Athletic League. Consistent with the era's discriminatory practices, Mr. S. was on the League's track team but was not allowed to go in the Athletic League. According to his daughter, Mr. S. traveled frequently to Washington, D. C. as a scribe for the federal government. His daughter, Ms. S. is a college administrator.

Another former COA resident, the survivor of a set of Black/Native American female twins contacted Karen Franklin, Director of the Judaica Museum at Hebrew Home for the Aged in an attempt to retrace her Native American ancestry. Although, apparently younger when placed, like Mr. S., this twin also recalled time spent living on the reservation prior to being placed with COA. She possesses a child-like drawing of a native American man with headdress, that she says is her vaguely remembered uncle. Her outreach to Ms. Franklin stemmed from a commitment she made upon the death of her twin sister to try to learn more about their family of origin.

attention of the U.S. Committee for the Care of European Children" (COA Board Minutes, 7/12/40).



My dear Mr Ketchum,

You have very frequently heard me speak of an attempt in which I have been engaged to effect the liberation of two young female slaves in the island of Curaçoa. You also know something of the difficulties which I have encountered, in accomplishing the object. I have at last received from Mr Foulke, news of the purchase of the youngest one, for three hundred and nine dollars, which is one hundred dollars more than had been subscribed. It therefore becomes necessary for me to make some additional efforts, and I have therefore taken the liberty of applying to you, to help me out of my difficulty. The money has been paid by Mr Foulke's correspondent, and my father is under obligations to make the payment good. I know that you are no stranger to the blessedness of giving, and I trust the application will not have less weight, because it comes from a near friend. I do not think you will ever regret having bestowed some portion of your abundance, in rescuing two females from slavery and degradation, and restoring them to an unhappy mother. Forgive me, if I have presumed too far, and believe me

Your affectionate sister,

Anecaitha

Feb. 23d 1838

Figure 8. Letter requesting safe passage of two slave girls from Curacao, courtesy of Harlem Dowling West Side Center for Children and Family Services

WWII also had a positive impact on the fundraising ability of the COA board of directors. As anticipated, the general esprit de corps in the country during the war years benefited the fundraising efforts essential to support the work of COA. Mr. Payson, Chairman of the male Board of Advisors of COA, predicted "*the recent declaration of war may make fundraising more difficult but ….a closer cooperation between all people now exists*" (COA Board Minutes, 12/8/41). In fact, during the war years COA enjoyed strong contributions from small donors and through the work of the board garnered big gifts as well. The Publicity Committee of the Board (COA Board Minutes, 4/13/ 45) charged with fundraising and public relations, advised of the need to

> "*Expand donors of $100 and up to reduce the cost of our money raising activities. Our large base of small gifts is very healthy but we must make certain that big giving keeps pace and big giving comes about largely through board efforts*".

a. INSIDE: "*THERE*" STORY---THE ENVIRONMENT, THE BOARD AND THE INMATES

COA alumni make a strong distinction between life within the orphanage, often referred to as "*there*" and the outside world. "*There*" was home. Four prominent themes emerged in exploration of "*There*"---the environment, relationships, routines and "*love*". Memories of "*there*" evoke fond memories of a scenic environment where children could frolic; where they felt safe enough to explore and grow. "*There*" was a place where there were strong emotional bonds, especially among children from the same cottage. These bonds were sometimes closer than those with kin on the outside; some led to lifelong

friendships or even marriage. "*There*" included the day-to-day routines of the orphanage---school, the staff, and the infirmary. It also included the elite outsiders who visited the orphanage because "*they cared about us*".

Between 1930 and 1934, the COA population doubled from 400 to 800, more than half of which were boarded out. By 1937, COA had 322 children in institutional care and 436 children placed in foster homes (Billingsley & Giovannoni, 1972). "*There*" does not refer to the entire organization. Foster homes and apprenticeships are poignantly defined as being outside of COA, although former residents know that they were part of COA. In fact, former residents dissociate the foster homes and experiences in them from "*there"*, the beautiful place that they called "*home*".

Environment

In 1907, COA moved its orphanage from Amsterdam Avenue, once a remote location, in Manhattan to a "*fine stretch of land, comprising about 19,000 acres*". From 1907 to 1946 the orphanage was located in the Riverdale section of the Bronx on the scenic Hudson River. Although the current community is suburban, and not as rustic as in the early 1900's, the view from the location is still a beautiful unobstructed panorama of the Palisades and the Hudson River. Its property value has increased exponentially. For children who came mostly from the inner city, it provided a rural setting in which they could experience natural beauty with all of its wonders.

Former "*students",* seniors now over 70 years in age, describe Riverdale as "*heaven*", a "*wonderful"* location that was like having your very own "*Central*

Park". The setting provided an ethereal backdrop to the very human experience of life in the orphanage. Reminiscences about the physical location are prominent in discussions about life at Riverdale. Even as children, they didn't take the luxury of the site for granted. As adults their eyes twinkle as they recall their "*home*". Some attest that the physical setting contributed to their personal development, as this study respondent recalled:

> *"To be able to live in that environment, 20 acres overlooking the Hudson…like heaven...Everything about it was perfect. What else can you say? It was just beautiful. Look at what you had. The location. Where you were. You couldn't think negative. You had the proper environment for self-development. You didn't need somebody to help you. You helped yourself. You were able to go into the earth, to communicate with nature, to explore without being brainwashed by some other force. You learned to develop and appreciate yourself. What your eyes saw, you believed. You executed. You developed. It was just a blessing. God works in mysterious ways...What more could you ask for? I lived a child's life. I explored. I did everything I felt big enough to do; I wanted to do. I learned to swim. I farmed. Thank God for the Colored Orphan's Asylum."*
>
> **Mr. Everett**[37]

[37]Mr. Everett is about 6 feet tall, coffee complexioned with medium build. He is a stylish dresser, very outspoken and clearly self-assured. Starting at age 16, Mr. E. had many careers, served in the military and retired as a NYC corrections officer. Mr. E. also lived and owned businesses in the United States and Africa. He is the youngest of the E. children who were placed at COA after their young mother attempted to commit suicide with her school-aged children. He is the brother of Mrs. T.

Figure 9. Winter view of Riverdale COA cottages with Hudson River in background

Figure 10. Winter view of Riverdale COA cottages

The expansive and picturesque Riverdale site was far removed from the crowded conditions of the inner city. Its country like environment filled with greenery, animal life and panoramic views of the Hudson River. It was a site that many COA wards would come to think of as "*home*". Set in a geographically

scenic location, these sprawling new grounds housed the children of COA for the next 40 years.

> *"When the children come to us could anything be greater contrast to their former surroundings than the institution of our Asylum standing high on the banks of the beautiful Hudson, surrounded by lawns and fine old trees, far from the noisy whirl of this great city, with pure, free air entering every crevice of the buildings and filling its inmates with health, joy and life."*
>
> ***COA Annual Report, 1925***

Two alumni held onto these recollections of nature*:*

> *"We had fresh air. We had a view of the Hudson River. We had pheasants, rabbits and snakes. We would cut a snake apart and expect for it to be back together when we came back. It was a beautiful place."*
>
> **Mr. H.**

> *"I just loved it "there", being near the water. I always was a nature lover."*
>
> **Mrs. H.**

Figure 11. Riverdale COA grounds photo courtesy of Harlem Dowling-West Side Center for Children and Family Services

The woodsy natural grounds of the campus were uneven in terrain extending from a modestly used thoroughfare back to the Hudson River. The sparsely developed surrounding community housed an elite suburban community. Ms. H. recalled that Mme. Chiang Kai-shek, wife of the leader of Nationalist China, lived on one of the winding paths that led to the orphanage. The New York Central, the train to more northern parts of the state, ran just behind the property.

> *"We would go down to the Hudson River where the NY Central line was. The train company reported us to the orphanage and the authorities got on the home to control us and stop us from going down to the railroad."*
>
> **Mr. Floyd**

The main building of the Colored Orphans' Asylum at Riverdale was occupied from 1907 to 1946. It housed the school, administrative offices, the hospital, rooms for the staff, and dormitories for some of the children.

Figure 12. Photo and inscription from RCA 120th Anniversary Report, courtesy of Harlem Dowling-West Side Center for Children & Family Services

The main administrative building of the orphanage was nested in trees and shrubs, some with edible fruit like apples and strawberries. *"There was a long road and caterpillars used to come down it in the summer"* (**Mrs. W**.). This winding dirt road extended from the building to the property's main entrance. The administration building was a wide brick edifice with dormers[38]. It housed the nursery for children under age 5, kitchen, bakery, a dining hall, classrooms for children in grades K-8 and administrative offices, and a clothing room and infirmary in the basement.

> "*The other thing we had that was fantastic was a library."*
>
> **Mr. Everett**

The administration building also had a chapel, a big room that was used for church, graduations, movies and events. Before an event, the children would line up in a big field in front of the main administrative building. Behind this building stood seven cottages for the children over age; six for boys and one for girls. Children over age five were congregated within a cottage according to their ages. Memories of cottage life were still vivid for this respondent:

> "*If you stood on the steps of the main building facing the river, to the right the hill was a circle with 6 cottages around it. To the left, was (cottage) No.7, a swimming pool and a barn. We had one horse. It pulled the wagon around to pick up things from the cottages."*
>
> **Mr. Clark[39]**

The Board

Board service was charitable, unpaid work. Members were expected to

---

[38] The main building's structure has been maintained and renovated with an expanded structure, by its current owners, the Hebrew Home for the Aged, which purchased the property from COA in 1946. The cottages have been demolished. Recent renovations and parking lot additions have taken away from the openness of the space, but not its beauty.

[39] Mr. Clark is one of 6 siblings; the two youngest were admitted to COA. He came from a family of entertainers. His sister danced at the World's Fair; a brother was an actor in the Broadway performance of Green Pastures. Mr. C. now lives in the Southeast.

invest their time, talents and treasures. Referencing the 1899 Secretary's Report to the board, Secretary, Eleanor Payson wrote in the 1925 Annual Report

> *"The first work of a new member of the Board of Managers is to try to understand life at the Asylum."*

Until 1939 the board of trustees of COA was comprised exclusively of White Protestant women from prominent families of varied dominations e.g., Quakers, Methodists, Episcopalian, etc.[40] Consistent with the patriarchy of the period and mirroring societal racial and gender segregation, white males, often the husbands of trustees served on an Advisory Board that provided financial consult to the women directors. The Advisory Board managed investments and real estate including holding mortgages for investment properties throughout Manhattan[41].

For some there appeared to be a family commitment to COA board service; as one passed off the board after lengthy service, another family member would succeed them. A board resolution dated September 11, 1936 marked the death of trustee, Miss Ruth Murray, who was the great niece of Mary Murray, co-founder of COA. On May 14, 1943, another long-term trustee was honored when the board received a letter from the State Department of Social Welfare congratulating Mrs. Parker on 50 years of service to COA.

At the February 9, 1920 regular board meeting, a recommendation was made to the Nominating Committee that *"the names of Negros and Jewish*

---

[40] Seraile (2011) discusses an earlier move to elect a "colored" trustee in 1919 that was quashed by the membership. Notes of failed vote were discarded so that there would be no public record of their decision.

[41] Mortgage investments supplemented per capita payments from the Department of Public Welfare for children in the care of COA and were used to pay outstanding debt and make capital improvements.

members of the Board of Directors, be brought up as soon as possible." As they were in other areas of decision-making, the COA board was slow in implementing this change. Although the recommendation was made in 1920, the first Negro trustee, Mrs. William F. Wortham was not approved until 1939.

At a special meeting of the board held on May 9, 1944, the following were among the amendments to the Articles of Incorporation put forth to address outdated practice inclusive of the relationship of males in COA governance:

1. *…The board of directors was opened to male service.*
2. *Husbands of members who are not members shall not be liable for any loss to the corporation occasioned by the neglect or misfeasance of his wife; but if he should have received any money from his wife, belonging to the said corporation or the same shall have been applied to his use, he shall be accountable therefore.*

Efforts to diversify the board continued and a special meeting of the board was held to consider names for increased membership on September 29, 1944. Of the 43 names approved, 8/19 men were Negroes; there were 7 Jewish people and 28 Protestants (COA Board Minutes, 9/29/44).

At the February 9, 1940 Board Meeting, the members were advised of the participation of Mrs. McCullogh, a member, in the White House Conference on Children. She was "*especially interested in the children of minority groups and brought back a very interesting report*." During Mr. Murphy's his tenure as director, which was concurrent with the ethnic and gender diversification of the board, the board was continually urged to educate itself about issues and concerns in the Negro community. In part this was due to the location of boarding homes in Negro communities, e.g., Harlem and Jamaica, Queens. Murphy suggested, *"the Board follow a little more closely the thinking and writing*

being done relative to the Negro" citing specific publications that might be "*authority on Negro relationships*" (COA Board Minutes, 3/5/42). Mrs. Malvin Proctor[42], a Negro board member, echoed this sentiment when she urged her colleagues to "*read Negro newspapers*" (May 26, 1943).

Adherence to the organizational mission encountered multiple challenges in the early decades of the 20th century that fell into different but, interconnected domains: infrastructure, finance and program. These three areas were the primary areas of focus in board meetings. Infrastructural issues included the amount of space and the cost of maintenance, as well as staffing. Finance included operational costs, fund management and fundraising; and program included program structure, activities and demographics. The infrastructural demands, particularly facilities, were burdensome to the organization as it struggled to fulfill its mission and be responsive to its programmatic agenda.

In stark contrast to the beauty of the COA grounds were the increasingly out-dated and deteriorating building structures. Board minutes from the 1920's until the orphanage's closure are replete with extended discussions about repair and upgrade needs. By the 1930's, per capita costs exceeded revenues, particularly if the census was below 180. However, higher census required more staff and created more wear on the property. In 1935, the board was advised that

> "*Besides the daily general repairs that are required to buildings 30 years old in an institution of this size (*were the following repair needs*):*
> - *Fireproof cottage 7*
> - *The Edison current from the engine room to the movie room*

[42] Mrs. Malvin Proctor's was the wife of Dr. Malvin H. Proctor who served as head of the

- *The hot water boiler in the main building*
- *Cottage steam pipes need to be covered*
- *Ice Plan needs to be overhauled*
- *A steam leak at the end of the main building*
- *Overhaul of large generator*
- *Replacement of pantry sinks and drain boards*
- *Replace wash troughs with basins in the nurseries*
- *North and south verandas in main building*

At the 1937 Annual Meeting, the board was advised

> "*A large amount of money has been expended on repairs at the institution…the time has come when much of the cottages are in need of repair, especially the beds which the children have outgrown. The floors in the institution need to be redone and the stairs are in need of repair. The best use of the institution is still under discussion*".

Compromises and short-term fixes were made; some items were constructed in shop classes where children labored and learned marketable skills. Maintenance plans were developed to enable the institution to address immediate needs and implement larger more costly projects over time. Structural renovations accommodated the expansion of the population in excess of the intended capacity and changes in the gender and age of the children e.g., the increased number of girls required additional bathroom facilities. These renovations were often the focus of targeted capital campaigns. However, by the 1940's it was clear that repair needs exceeded the financial resources of the institution. On December 9, 1940 Superintendent Murphy advised the board

> *"Many expensive repairs and replacements* (are*) still to be made if our standards of care are not to be lowered."*

Still struggling to respond, a resolution was passed on November 27, 1944 to

> *"Set funds aside for repairs as soon as possible from surplus of*

income over expenses."

COA enjoyed a long history of support from local and some international donors. Board members solicited individual and corporate donors, conducted direct mail campaigns, hosted teas, and theater parties. Celebrity entertainers also hosted fundraisers for the orphanage at the Savoy and other locations citywide. Among them the Duke Ellington (jazz orchestra) and Lucky performed at the 2nd annual ball to benefit the Riverdale home (Amsterdam News, August, 1944); Cab Calloway hosted COA youth for a photo opportunity at the historic Theresa Hotel which became the home office of the successor organization, Harlem Dowling-West side Center for Children and Family Services. Calloway described the children as the "type of youth the NAACP hopes to develop through the Youth Guidance Series" (The People's Voice, 10/9/43).

Board members spearheaded events like the benefit party held by the Harlem Auxiliary and fundraising teas such as one hosted by Judge and Mrs. Delany with Eleanor Roosevelt as a distinguished guest (Board Minutes, March 8, 1940). Mrs. Delany also secured proceeds from the Henry Armstrong boxing bout (Board Minutes, May 26, 1943). Benefit theater parties showcased productions with prominent Black actors e.g., Paul Robeson in Othello and the production of James Baldwin's Native Son. Bill Robinson and Lena Horne were among the famed Black entertainers/actors who signed Christmas fundraising letters on behalf of COA (Board minutes, October 15, 1943).

The Inmates: Children Who Resided in COA

Children were placed with COA for varying reasons e.g., parental mental illness, abandonment, widowed parents who could not work and provide childcare and increasingly there were child related problems like minor delinquency. Increasingly the children in placement had single living parents (Superintendent's Report to the Board of Directors, 1936). Some children were admitted along with their siblings; others, who were among the youngest or oldest in a family, were placed because the circumstances in the family at the time rendered them unable to care for them. One family of five children entered COA when their mother left them behind to join the congregation of Father Divine. (See footnote 20.) The children's father took a new wife who was unable to care for them.

Some children entered so young that they knew nothing about their family backgrounds, and lived out their childhood under the care of COA--- alternately boarded out and at other points living on campus.

> "*My mother just left me in the hospital. So they took me from Bellevue Hospital to the New York Foundling Hospital. From the New York Foundling Hospital, they took me to the Colored Orphan's Asylum…I lived in a lot of little homes."*
>
> **Mrs. Washington**

Mr. Clark was living at home with his mother and brother when his mother had a stroke. His older siblings were living on their own and working in the entertainment industry. When his mother became ill, the older siblings were unable to care for the younger ones who were left at home caring for their

mother. Mr. Clark remembers going to court and being admitted to COA on May 15, 1940's, his sister's birthday.

> *"We never went back home. That's all I remember. I was sitting outside the courtroom; my mother and two sisters came out. Another lady came out…. I was detained at the Humane Society. I was quarantined because of chicken pox…. delayed at the shelter, NY Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children."*
>
> **Mr. Clark**

Typically children admitted were between the ages of 2 and 12. However, by the 1940's there were increasing numbers of adolescents as COA expanded its policy to accept older youth in response to urging from the City. The median age of children was two years older in foster care with 40% adolescents; the age was also creeping up within the institution (COA Board Minutes, November 14, 1941).

Routines/Structure

Life within the institution included set times for church, meals, school, homework, chores, play and structured activities. Dress was determined by the day's activities. In the 1800's children were uniforms but by the 1930's regular clothes were worn on most days. On assembly days, when the children convened for special programs in the administrative building, boys wore ties and white shirts. Girls were similarly attired.

Weekdays were structured around preparation for school, school attendance and after-school recreational activities. When the bugle was sounded by one of the boys, the children knew that it was time to go to school in the main building, where most of the children attended school.

> *"Johnny S. would blow the bugle. We had to line up outside the cottage and march up the stairs to the back of the main building."*
>
> **Mr. Floyd**[43]

"Bugle was for you to line up… to march over to school. Our director at the time was an old, Persian general, Pittman...He didn't have that much to say to you but he ran a very good ship".

Mr. Everett

"In the evening we had a big play ground. We played basketball, horseshoes, etc. At 8:00 they would blow the whistle to tell us to go to the cottages, take a shower and go to bed. At 9:00 in the morning we had church services."

Mr. Floyd

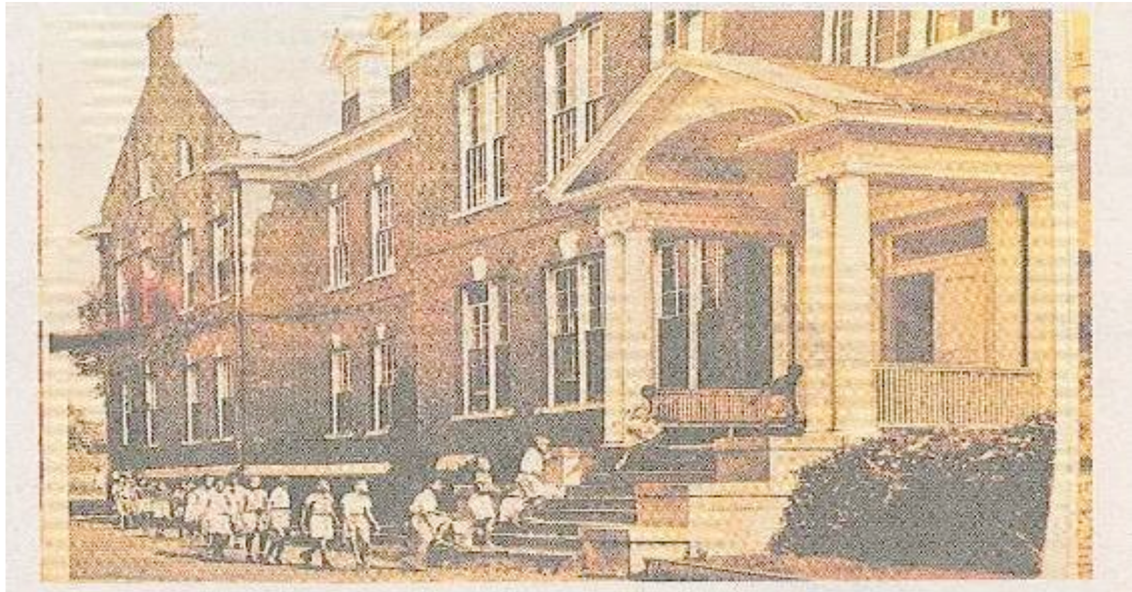


Figure 13. Courtesy of Uptown News, June 26, 2011

For children coming from uncertain or chaotic backgrounds, the uniforms and the structure and routines of the institution provided external boundaries and regularity, freeing them up to be children. Unstructured time enabled children to play with pets, go to the playground, play Cowboys and Indians, hold rodeos or explore the property and the surrounding area. It gave them the opportunity to develop important relationships with other inmates that shaped and affirmed

them as people. Many of these relationships did not continue much past young adulthood, but they had an impact on the lives of these respondents and are remembered fondly as these three alumni recall:

> *"After school we had free time. We had a lot of teams. Always had a softball team. In the fall we played football. We had a basketball court. There was no Michael Jordan."*
>
> **Mr. Clark**
>
> *"We had nice times on that playground. They had it…separated, boys on one end, girls on the other. Sliding boards and swings. In the summer time we would have what you called 'night playground' which was nice; we stayed outside until dark."*
>
> *"In the back of the building, they would have like a shower, a pipe. And just to run through that water like a faucet in the summertime. Later on they had pools back of one of the cottages. Everything moved so carefree. We would go down what we called "down the hill' toward the railroad tracks, not on the tracks. There was an area where we would play when you didn't go to the playground. Everything was so carefree like."*
>
> **Mrs. Bernard**[44]

---

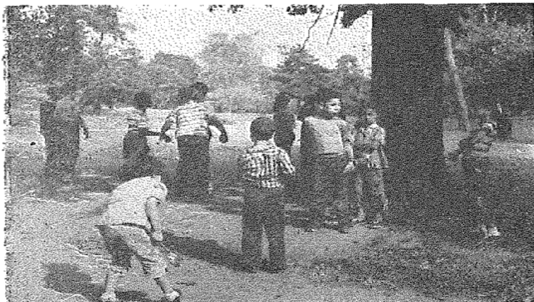
[44] Mrs. Bernard is a petite attractive woman with a girlish smile. She is medium brown complexioned with curly hair covered b a newsboy cap. Her youthful, quick smile makes her appear younger than her 77 years. She is pleasant and eager to share her story. At times her voice was animated as though reliving the pleasure of growing up. She is a retired librarian, a widow with no children, now living in the south. Mrs. B. was the middle child of 5, all placed at COA when their parents separated; one brother and sister are deceased. The oldest surviving brother, age 87 and the youngest 70, live on the eastern seaboard, 9 states apart. Mrs. B/ is still in the middle. Both brothers were interviewed for this study.

"We had a horse up there named 'Sea Biscuit. We were allowed to have pets; dogs and cats. George R's family brought him the family pet. The pet would go with me. The dog lived in our cottage."

Mr. Floyd

Children were taught activities of daily living and a shared responsibility to their home, necessary skills for independence once they left the orphanage.

HEALTHY PLAY IN HAPPY PLACES



Neighborhood children—with Riverdale youngsters a part of the group—talk over plans for the day.

Baseball games in the back yard are best for small fry just learning to catch and throw.

This litle girl likes to dance, and on Christmas Day she ended her performance with a deep, deep curtsy.

A couple of weeks in camp is one of the biggest events of the whole year for Riverdale's children.

Figure 14. 1936-1956 120 Year Anniversary Report, Riverdale Children's Association

COA founders were concerned that inmates were taught basic reading and arithmetic but also work skills that would enable them to be self-sufficient. Some board members were particularly concerned that children develop a sense of industry. Children were assigned chores dependent on the child's age and gender as these two alumna describe:

> *"I remember I was learning how to cook at five years old. I made oatmeal and toast. You had your chores to do and they were executed daily. When you came home from school, no one had to tell you to change your clothes; and then you went back out."*
>
> **Mr. Everett**

> *"On the weekends we knew we had special duties to do. Like we would polish the doorknobs and do the floors. We had little assignments that we had to take care of."*
>
> **Mrs. Bernard**

> *"I worked in people's homes; I worked for families. The husband was rich. I was assigned to clean the silverware. During Summer I worked for another family. The families were just making a contribution to the home."*
>
> **Mr. Hughes**

Carolena M. Wood[45], Board Member raised questions about *"how to fit the children to live in the world after they left the asylum and how to teach them to handle money."* A pioneer and maverick of new approaches to caring for dependent children, she created a store on the grounds where the children could buy small articles for token money and learn how to manage money. Money earned on and off campus served as a nest egg for youth starting out as young

[45] Carolena Wood was a leader on the board of COA from 1895-1936. A board resolution acknowledging her death and her service to the organization recognized her role as Chairman of the Building Committee that erected the buildings at Riverdale in 1904, First directress from 1909-1913, Acting Superintendent for 6 months in 1914, active on the Boarding- out and the Aftercare committee. She pioneered cottage care of the children at Riverdale, which was a relatively new practice in 1904. She was insistent that there should be cottages where groups of children could live in a household instead of being regimented in huge dormitories. Later she championed the Boarding Out Program and was active on the Aftercare and Boarding out Committee (COA Board Minutes, 4/8/36).

adults. A board amendment protected those funds in savings available to youth upon request.

> "*Money saved or earned by a child while under the care of the institution may be held in trust for the child by the Institution...it shall be understood that any children whose bank books are held at the Institution shall be reimbursed at any time they happen to demand their money*".
>
> **COA Board Minutes, January 9, 1941**

Structured sports were also an important part of life at COA. Sporting activities ranging from football, bowling, baseball, track and basketball and boxing included competition with other orphanages, as well as between the COA students as described by this respondent below:

> "*We had boxing matches. On Friday nights, Mr. Lee, the Athletic Director would put on a match. Fights sometimes came up spontaneously. In the summer, we had a quiet time at night. A fight would be in a circle; we would watch two guys fighting underneath the Christmas tree. It was funny. Sometimes it was a mismatch. Most times it was a good match".*
>
> **Mr. Clark**

Cottages were staffed by house parents, some married. Most of the house parents were Black; many were of West Indian heritage. The house parents provided most of the daily care and socialization for the children. In the early years the cottage mothers prepared the meals before meals became centralized, prepared and served in the main building.

> "*Cottage mothers used to do the cooking for the cottage. Then they started putting it all in the main building."*
>
> **Mr. Hughes**[46]

[46] Mr. Hughes is of average height and build, dark complexioned with a strong clasp and raspy voice. He is intelligent, pensive and articulate. Mr. H. is married; a retired police detective--- polished and well traveled. He was older than most when he entered COA, already hell bent on a path towards delinquency.

Classes for grades kindergarten to eighth grade were held on the second floor. Older children went off grounds for high school. A former staff nurse, who was employed during her early twenties recalled that all of the children were encouraged to do their best academically.

> "*We had several kids going to* (Public School) *81 in Riverdale. These were the children who were exceptionally smart."* But even the children who attended school on grounds "*had plenty of encouragement and people to work with them*."
>
> **Miss Sargeant**[47]

Mr. Clark counts Mr. Obrien as one of his favorite staff at the orphanage because "*he taught us how to do arithmetic in our heads*". His other favorite, Ms. Thompson, taught them about Negro history. While most of the respondents said that COA provided a good education, Mr. J. who was boarded out for several years on Long Island has a different opinion. After experiencing school on the outside, Mr. J. felt that the education he received at COA was substandard; he had to repeat a grade when he went to school in his new Long Island community. When Mr. J later returned to COA for several years, he felt that he was more academically advanced than the other children.

> *"When I moved to Long Island I had no idea what was going on. They threw me out the 4th grade to 3rd grade. When I went back I was ahead of everyone. They made me skip a class. I don't know how my sister and brother felt about it. I felt that it was a waste. I wasn't the smartest guy in the world either but I knew that the school was not what it should have been."*
>
> **Mr. J.**[48]

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[47] Miss Sargeant was a single young nurse when she worked for three years at COA in the 1940's. Along with a Board member, Miss Boyd, she was instrumental in the participation of COA in the Negro Health Week Program. A donated chair was awarded to the cottage making the most progress in improving eating habits (COA Board Minutes, 4/9/43). Subsequently, Miss S. married and started a family. She eagerly participated in a focus group and Lehman College symposium along with alumni respondents. A stunning well dressed, stately woman with a striking silver and grey haircut, she garnered the same deference and respect from alumni respondents that she did when they were children although they are all elders. When she spoke Miss S. was articulate, authoritative and compassionate.

In general, Mr. J. was unhappy about returning to COA after his positive experience in a Long Island foster home. Unlike other respondents, he was pensive and generally somber with little affect as he described a monotonous experience at COA.

> "*I was 10 when I left and around 13 or 14 when I came back. The kids were older; we were all older. It just seemed to be a different atmosphere. I can't explain it. I didn't want to go back there, I know that. I wasn't happy to go back there. Maybe that was what the feeling was. At first I didn't know the difference when I was first there but then when I came back I had been on the island and came back to this atmosphere. I knew the difference. I didn't want to be there. I didn't like it at all."*
>
> **Mr. J.**

Having the school on grounds was transformative for some children who were truants on the outside. There was no opportunity to skip school. Informants refer to themselves as "*students*" rather than orphans or some other name connoting their status as wards. For youth like Mr. H., on-campus schooling made the difference between a lifestyle that was leading towards prison to one as a career police officer. A retired NYC police chief, Mr. H. earnestly believes that he would have been dead or in jail if not for his time in the safe and structured environment of COA.

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[48] Mr. J., brother of Mrs. Bernard and Mr. George was the youngest of three surviving siblings who were study informants. Along with his 4 siblings, he was placed in the nursery at COA in 1932 at age 2. Mr. J. recalls living with Mr. Floyd and Johnny S., the now deceased welterweight boxing champion and former bugler. Generally sullen as he spoke about his experience at COA, Mr. Js.' eyes twinkled when he advised that he became "smitten" with his wife when he was 10, when he first moved to Long Island. They later married and had two children when he was discharged from the service. Mr. J. reflected that leaving his future wife behind, when re-placed at COA, may have shaped the way he experienced his return to the orphanage. Upon the closure of COA Mr. J. negotiated a new foster home placement that allowed him to complete high school in a nearby Long Island town, enabling him to resume his studies and relationships established in the initial boarding out placement.

COA children were given a basic education as well as an introduction to classical music[49], instruments, dance and choral singing. Mrs. Morton proudly boasted that Riverdale children were taught that the real name for the theme song of the Long Ranger was the William Tell Overture. Mrs. Hamilton[50] remembered, "*every Saturday I got singing lessons*."

Cottage 2 was the only one with a piano. A library on grounds introduced them to reading about the outside world. The children learned about themselves and gained perspective on how others might view them as orphans or throwaways. At the same time the teachers encouraged them to explore the possibilities that lay ahead of them while introducing them the outside world. As adults, the respondents presented as articulate, introspective and cosmopolitan, as exemplified is the three narratives below:

> *"You hear this stuff about kids doing things in school today. We went to school and we were well taught."*
>
> **Mr. H.**

> *"They taught us about Black history before anybody ever thought about teaching black history. We were told that we had no history and they wanted to show us that we did and they taught us about our history."*
>
> **Mr. Everett**

> "*Mrs. Thompson, a teacher, wrote a book on Negro history. She always told me that I would be a leader. I drew pictures with chalk;*

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[49] Mr. Clarence, who died at age 90, shared many happy memories with his family of the life at COA, where he was placed along with a brother. His happiest memories were of learning to play the cello, which led to his career as a classical musician.

[50] Mrs. Hamilton. is an attractive, energetic, honey colored woman, with native American and mulatto heritage. She still sings in several choirs but gave up performing professionally after her son's birth. An outspoken woman, she recalls singing in the chorus of La Traviata with Dorothy Dandridge. She laments that she "*would have been somebody if I had just been there* (COA)", reflecting on her boarding out, the events that surrounded her placements and subsequent first marriage. Mrs. is a widow, whose only son died at age 18 as a result of a sports related injury. Mrs. H. is retired millenary and real estate owner. She purchased her first home as a single mother and leveraged it to purchase a two family home.

I was sort of an artist. Dorie Miller, one of the students, was a cook on a ship at Pearl Harbor. There is public housing in Long Island City named after him. On December 2, 1940 he got on deck and started shooting at planes. After Mrs. Thompson told us about Dorie Miller, he drew a picture of him."

Mr. Clark

The children participated in plays around holiday or cultural themes including the re-enactment of the burning of the 41st site of COA during the Draft Riots of 1863.

"When I was a young girl I was given the part to play of the young girl who had run back into the home to get the bible…"We did the plays for ourselves. We would have Chapel and then we would present the play. They had a little band. I played the triangles. On special days, the band played and we wore costumes; it was nice. We always had Christmas plays."

Mrs. Bernard

Children were engaged in a host of recreational and educational activities, sometimes courtesy of donors or board members. Warner Brothers donated a projector that they used on movie nights. There were weekend dances where older youth dressed up for the occasion. Educational, cultural and recreational outings included the stock market on Wall Street, the Apollo, Schomburg Center for Black Research, Rockefeller Center and Radio City Music Hall. Some children spent summers at Camp Norge and Camp Minisink, two of the faith-based camps that catered to Negro children. Sometimes, they went out to the movies theaters in Castle Hill and Marble Hill in the Bronx. They were exposed to many kinds of experiences although they were sometimes reminded that they were *"colored*".

> *“We went on a lot of trips ---Bear Mountain, Orchard Beach, Coney Island and the Bronx Zoo. We didn’t go to Palisades Park because we were ‘colored’. In 1945 at the Lincoln Theater, I heard Dizzy Gillespie do Bee-bop.”*
>
> **Mr. Clark**

Students participated in unstructured play and formal teams. They were taught collaboration and teamwork through sports competitions with other schools and institutions. Field Days included youngsters from other child caring institutions. They were proud of their ability to excel in every sport introduced to them. On Labor Day, 1932, “*the Hebrew Orphan Asylum band played for us and we had field events, prizes and ‘eats’ for the visitors*” (Minutes of the Annual Board Meeting, 1932-33).

The RCA choir performed at Leake and Watts, the neighboring orphanage for White children; for the priests at the neighboring St. Vincent’s Monastery and at church concerts in Riverdale, High Bridge, Yonkers and various venues throughout the city. They also made Glee Club broadcasts on WJZ on Sunday mornings (Annual Board Meeting Minutes, 1932-33).

> “*They got a kick out of hearing us sing.”*
>
> **Mr. Floyd**

Most of the teaching staff was White; house parents were Black. Dating to 1848 hiring of Dr. James McCune Smith, who served as Medical Director for 25 years (Harris, 2003), there was always a presence of Blacks among the medical staff---nurses, physicians and dentists. Although the alumni recounted strong

memories of the roles that staff played in affirming them, educating them or challenging their potential, alumni made no distinction between Black and White staff. The first black superintendent, Mr. Poe, was hired in the late 1930's. His wife was a social worker for the girls.

> "*We just knew they were Black or they were White. But that was okay.*"
>
> **Mrs. Bernard**

> *"And then we got Ms. A. She straightened us up she said you ran everybody else out of here but you got a tough one in here now. And she was strict. She didn't play She taught us to be neat, to be clean."*
>
> **Mrs. Timmons**

> *"Upon entry into the cottage you were instructed what you were to do. You were given your daily chores which consisted of making your bed, keeping your clothes clean, washing them, ironing them, participating in preparing the meals. It was a very structured plan. It was simplicity. All you had to do was follow the format and you had no trouble".*
>
> **Mr. Everett**

Mr. Floyd was one child who couldn't follow the rules. He was a jokester who seemed not to learn a lesson from the punishments he received from staff or the altercations he encountered with other children. When he threw rocks at other children, he was *"just having fun*".

> *"I had friends and enemies. I would throw rocks at them. One boy tried to hit me with a rock. He wasn't sane. I could have been dead. But I got along with everybody. One tried to bully me. I kicked him in the mouth."*
>
> **Mr. Floyd**

Relationships and "Love"

Among the Children

Relationships with other children in COA were very important to the children, especially those whose connections to biological family were severed. Children who shared a cottage became like "*family*". Fictive kin shared responsibilities and looked out for one another, cared for each other and taught each other values. Some children were boarded out to the same foster homes. Others connected and then re-connected as circumstances caused them to move in and out of the orphanage.

> *"Everybody I knew was in Cottage I. The others I knew by face. We hung together with people in our cottage."*
>
> **Mr. Floyd**

> "*We had what we called big brothers/big sisters. That was not a program. It was something that the kids themselves started. It was not institutional input. I had a big brother (Mr. H. was the 'big brother'). My best girlfriend taught me how to smoke. He told me he didn't want me to smoke. ' I don't want you smoking'. They teach (sic) you good habits. It was just like having one who loved you and cared how you turned out. Anything that you were doing that was not going to help you be productive in society, they would surely give you a good going over. Not hitting you but scolding you, perhaps not speaking to you. They took interest; somebody gives a darn about you. Somebody always had your back."*
>
> **Mrs. Washington**

> *"We had a club called 'Commandos'. We protected each other. There were a couple of kids from the other cottage with who I had strong relationships. Each cottage had its own clique."*
>
> **Mr. Clark**

"When we would see ones on the outside, we would say "hi".
Mrs. Washington

Most respondents reported that they did not continue the relationships much beyond the closure of the home, as they went forward to begin their adult lives as young adults. However, some re-connected after a long absence during a reunion convened by COA alumni in the 1980's. Some were boarded out together with youth they knew from the orphanage or in the same community. As young adults, they went into the military together, provided job leads to one another or were roommates. Others forged relationships that continued intermittently throughout their lives. Still others met their spouses at COA or through connections associated with COA. Some settled in the same communities as adults.

After a long hiatus, some alumni re-connected during a reunion convened by COA alumni in the 1980's. At another reunion in 2005 co-facilitated by Harlem Dowling, the Hebrew Home for the Aged and Lehman College, the daughters of a deceased alumna were observed referring to another alumna, Mrs. M. as "*aunt*"[51]. Still another, Mrs. Washington, who met her husband while both were COA wards, introduced her daughter to the children of an alumna, identifying them to her child as "cousins". As described by Mr. Hughes, when they entered COA, children felt *"accepted into a community".*

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[51] The use of "aunt", "auntie" or "uncle" are terms of endearment frequently used by African Americans rather than surnames, to address elders who are not related by blood but with whom there is a close relational bond. I observed this same tradition in West Africa, where all female elders are addressed as "mother" .

Children/Celebrities

Celebrity visitors made the children feel special. Their presence and involvement with COA was good for fundraising and raising the overall status of the organization but it also validated the worth of its residents. Among the many visiting celebrities were Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, Eleanor Roosevelt, Cab Calloway, Joe Louis, Lena Horne, Judge Delany, "*the first Black judge in NYC*" (Mr. F.), and Paul Robeson. Celebrity visitors brought positive media attention to the organization. Mr. Floyd noted, "*When they speak, people listen.*" It was an honor to host these guests; some made a lasting impression on the children.

> *"A lot of people donated, that started with the Quaker ladies. They donated even from London...we had movie actresses, celebrities to visit us. There was something they liked about us".*
>
> **Mr. Floyd**

Older alumni recall a fellow inmate sent to COA as an adolescent because of her acting out behavior--- famed singer Ella Fitzgerald[52] with whom some sang in the COA choir. Celebrity visitors feathered children's fantasies about becoming entertainers, musicians, boxers, etc. They broadened the children's horizons on what they could do or become. Black or White, celebrities made the children feel special, like they could be or do anything.

> *"My brother, W.[53] (*boy was called by his last name*) and I would introduce guests."*

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[52] Noted jazz vocalist Ella Fitzgerald was born in 1917 in Newport News, Virginia. She relocated to Yonkers, NY with her mother, as a child. Following the death of her mother, Ella lived with an aunt in Harlem. In the early 1930's, Ella's truant and delinquent behavior led to her arrest and placement in COA. At age 16, she spent a year at NY State Training School for Girls in Hudson, NY. Ms. Fitzgerald escaped from the Training School and lived on the streets before entering Amateur Night at the Apollo, where her singing career began. Ms. Fitzgerald received 13 Grammy Awards and national recognition from President's Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush. During her illustrious 60–year career she rarely spoke about her time as a ward of the state.

[53] The widow of Mr. Washington was a respondent in this study. They met at COA.

“John White was a folk singer, who played the guitar. He brought his son with him (to COA). I was impressed he could sing and pay guitar. I play acoustic guitar.

Mr. Clark

“I got to dance with Bill Robinson. Oh absolutely wonderful! He was not strange to us because we would see all of the Shirley Temple/ Bill Robinson movies.

When he came he gave all of the children a brand new dime. And we were rich. He made sure that we all had a dime.

People were there from outside of the place to see him. And he refused to perform until all of the children had seats. He didn’t want them standing because there were no seats. Let the other visitors stand.

Yeah we felt good. He said anybody wants to dance? I was always dancing. I went.”

Mrs. Bernard

“*We were up in the chapel. Some kids put on boxing matches. Somebody has got a picture of that. Joe (*Louis*) refereed the matches. It was exciting, everyone knew who he was.”*

Mr. Jones

Children/Staff

Respondents recalled few close or intimate relationships with staff. Mr. Floyd said he got special attention from Mr. Murphy the superintendent and was invited to his home for dinner. But, moreover, children valued the general “acceptance” that they felt from staff and children--- irrespective of their backgrounds, or appearance.

“For me it was home when you didn’t have a home. One word--- ‘acceptance’”.

Mrs. Washington

Several respondents described corporal punishment in the boarding homes but only Mr. Floyd said that he received corporal punishment as a form of discipline used by teaching or cottage staff, even though corporal punishment in school was accepted during this era.

> *"They were very disciplined in school. They banged my head against the blackboard if you did something wrong. Or, she might hit me on the palms of my hands. One time I got blisters…Teachers got away with murder. They would slap you. But they made you learned. They didn't do it to everybody."*
>
> **Mr. Floyd**

> *"We were never beaten and everybody just got along really nicely."*
>
> **Mrs. Bernard**[54]

From the cottage staff children learned discipline, manners, hygiene, household maintenance and practical skills, like stretching food to accommodate a guest. According to Mrs. Washington, "*They taught us to be neat, to be clean…bring yourself up like young ladies* ". Respondents described firm discipline and repercussions for not following the rules. As adults they valued these lessons. The staff was consistent and straightforward; children knew what was expected of them.

> "*Whatever the reason, there you were treated on how you present yourself. If you were a good girl, you got good treatment. You got scolded because you need to be scolded. You got punished because you needed to be punished and you actually profited by that kind of circumstance. 99.9% of us…. I think we learned to*

[54] Mrs. Bernard is a petite attractive woman with a girlish smile. She is medium brown complexioned with curly hair covered by a newsboy cap. Her youthful and quick smile makes her appear younger than her age. She is pleasant and eager to share her story. At times her voice was animated as though reliving the pleasure of her growing up experience. She is a retired librarian, a widow with no children. Mrs. B. retired to the south. She was a fraternal twin, one of 7 children ---5 boys and 2 girls who entered COA in 1934 when her parents split up. Her 2 surviving brothers, the oldest and the youngest of the family, live in different states. Mrs. B. was 5 when they were placed.

> *become honest upright citizens. We learned good values, good principles. Personally, I drew from that, I am glad I did. It comes down later on, as you grow older*."
>
> **Mrs. Washington**

Staff sometimes admonished children who were longing for the imagined love of their birth families who abandoned them or were unable or unwilling to care for them. But even in the coldness of telling children that nobody wanted them, staff encouraged the children to embrace themselves; they accepted them and they cared for them.

> *"They told you things that made you feel good except saying that you are here because nobody wants you. Once you put that out of your mind, then you would be alright."*
>
> **Mrs. Timmons**

> "*It gave you a sense of being. You didn't have to wonder because the format was laid out. If you followed it, you and everyone else was a winner."*
>
> **Mr. Everett**

Sixty years later, Mrs. W. became teary as she recalled:

> "*That was my family and everything I had that was of any value or could give me any kind of backbone 'cause when you're out there, you are by yourself*".

The way that physical care was provided symbolized "*love*" to the children. Staff who were attentive to their needs, their appearance and how they were groomed and who accepted them irrespective of their appearance or perceived faults---these actions were defined as demonstrations of "*love*".

"*They just saw to it that all of those needs were met; all of those things that mean so much to a child growing up. You're not left alone. You're not going there with one blue sock and a faded sock or raggedy hair. You're cared about. It really means a lot."*

Mrs. Washington

Miss S. exemplified this concept of "*love*". She was a youthful but self-assured nurse in the early 1940's when she came to work at COA. Miss S. knew that her role extended beyond the medical care of the children. It included treating the children with affection and attending to their appearance and wellbeing just as one would any other child.

"I told my assistants when you take them somewhere they are to look like your children. You are going to take them looking nice."

Miss Sargeant

Miss Sargeant understood that some others would not value her children in the same way that she did. Her children were living in a setting that looked like paradise but it was located in the midst of a remote wealthy, White community, unaccustomed to Black children from the inner city. Miss Sargeant felt that part of the role of staff was to bolster the self-esteem of these children and to model appropriate interactions with others. Miss S. recalls in vivid detail her experiences in this narrative:

"So we got on the bus and Sammy was looking glorious. I took care of Sammy. I knew that he had his bath and I knew he looked good. I said to Sammy, 'You look nice and you pick your head up.'

We got on the bus and this little white boy sat with his mother and he kept touching his mother. And I heard the boy say to his mother 'Look at the dirty little boy'. This youngster knows that he looks nice...the little boy repeated it again. He (Sammy) looked up at me with such soulful eyes. He had such beautiful eyes. Anyway, it really made my stomach tight. I said, 'Now you know that you are not dirty. You know that I took care of you this morning and you are

not dirty.' I said to myself, 'Oh no. I can't keep quiet'. So I said to him, 'No, he's not a dirty little boy. He's a colored little boy but he's not a dirty little boy.'

Now the mother was trying her best really not to hear us. So I said to him, 'Why don't you talk to him? You tell him your name and he's going to tell you his name.' And the kids really started talking nicely. And I leaned and I said to the mother, 'This child has learned this at home about the dirty adults, about the dirty everything.' I said, 'don't get hysterical, but it's true. You're instilling a lot of prejudice within this little boy.'

I thought it was so funny, when I got on the bus there were a lot of elderly people coming from Yonkers. They were talking and chatting. All of a sudden, the bus got so quiet. I realize I am talking so that everybody on the bus can hear what I am saying. Really amazing but I felt so good when I stepped off that bus for the subway."

Miss Sargeant

"Home" is Gone

The continued financial burden of the wear and tear on the property was a hardship for the governing body of COA. The deteriorating property, along with excessive numbers of residents, impacted overall program quality.

Unable to undertake the cost of major repairs and needed upgrades, the board sought varied options to address this burden including donor cultivation, hosting fundraising events, seeking out merger prospects, boarding out children in increased numbers and exploring the prospect of selling the Riverdale property. Efforts to sell the property are reflected intermittently in board minutes from the 1930's onward. This exploration was concurrent with deliberations about changing the name, responding to the Race Discrimination Act by integrating and increasing the overall population in response to requests by the Mayor. However, they were unable to find buyers for the asking price.

"*We have received a letter from Messrs. Cross and Brown in regard to the purchase of our Riverdale property."*

COA Board Minutes, May 1, 1936

"*Mrs. Parker (Board President) advised that Mr. Wilson (Advisor) recommended stimulation of interest in sale of property*."

COA Board Minutes, December 13, 1940

Concerned about the conditions at COA, the Executive Committee reviewed the 1937 survey conducted by the NY State Department of Social Welfare "*item by item*".

> *"In all but two instances former practices have been corrected in line with State recommendations.* (As per NY State many of the deficiencies were attributed to the) *"Low general per capita which was at that time $434 compared with the city average of $595*. *Today our general per capita is running at $529."*
>
> **COA Board Minutes March 14, 1941**

A subsequent report discussed at the October 1, 1942 board meeting, found

> *"A favorable comparison was noted between the present study and that made 5 years ago:*
> - *Increase of professional staffing Foster Home Department*
> - *Inclusion of Negroes on the board*
> - *Change in attitude of the community towards the board.*

Also at this meeting in response to financial concerns, a Special Survey Committee was formed consisting of the combined Budget, Publicity and Executive Committee Chairs and a decision made to appeal to the Hall foundation for aid to support building improvements. Additionally, consideration was given to physical plant improvements including building chests for the girls in shop classes in order to alleviate storage issues due to the lack of closet space.

In 1944, with 400 waiting children, Mayor LaGuardia proposed development of a direct care program for New York City. At a meeting of the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies[55], representatives of sectarian and

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[55] The 1939 Annual Report of the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies states that its function is two-fold: provides leadership and direction on a broad and varied social service front; second, it functions as the Social Service Information and referral Bureau for the Federations of Churches of NYC. COA was an active participant in this organization along with other non-sectarian and Protestant agencies. Some COA

non-sectarian agencies discussed varied plans to meet the city's needs e.g. campaigning for more boarding homes and developing semi-professional homes that would house 5-8 children grouped according to need. It was noted

> "*At Riverdale, we have 30 vacancies that could be used for certain children, 11-15 years of age. The lack of personnel impedes ability to fill vacancies; probably issue is the same for other agencies*".

Representatives expressed opposition "*…to institutional programs for babies*" but believed *"that certain types of children would be cared for by a public agency, thus freeing the private agency to do the specialized and differentiated job, to undertake experimentation and to set standards*" (Case Committee Report, COA Board Minutes, 11/3/44).

On July 23, 1945 at a called meeting of the Executive Committee the Children's Committee reported on the following charges brought forth by Mr. Walter Offutt, a worker in charge of religious education:

1. *Lack of program for children*
2. *Inadequate supervision and uncontrolled delinquencies by the children*
3. *Poor sanitation*
4. *Weak administration that was trying to keep the true situation from the board.*

In a report to the Board, Messieurs Murphy, director, and Poe, assistant superintendent, that for two years they had been experiencing a staffing shortage of as much as 30% forcing them to hire

> "*Some staff whose lack of competence was recognized…* "*Maintenance and upkeep had become a serious problem. Staff had principally put to the task of holding things together until staff and materials might again be available."*

In response to these charges, the board established three committees to work jointly with staff: 1) Policy, 2) Program and 3) Plant. The Program committee also engaged the State Department of Welfare to evaluate COA

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board members were also on the board of the Federation. As a consequence, the two organizations impacted each other's agenda. Similar federations represent Catholic and Jewish agencies in NYC.

although a favorable review was received from them in 1943. Additionally, the board voted "*to ask Mr. Offut to resign because he was unable to work with administrative staff constructively*". This decision was not well received in the Black press despite the launching of a publicity campaign to counter the negative impact on relationships with the Black community.

OFFUTT EXPOSES RIVERDALE; FIRED

Pittsburgh Courier, August 4, 1945

Riverdale Asks State Probe To Prove Charges

Jobs On Seas Hold Promise For Real Tars

Figure 15. Amsterdam News, 8/4/45, courtesy of Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

Another issue of grave concern surfaced during the July 23, 1945 meeting, the employment of COA children in a hospital with tuberculosis patients. Mrs. Proctor, Chair of the Children's Committee, reported that at a meeting of the Children's Committee held in June (the prior month) a vote was taken ordering the children working in arrest home removed." When it was noted "*some children were still so employed, Mr. Poe (*the Negro Asst. Superintendent*) when approached stated that he could not move them bodily*".

Despite staff protests, Mr. Murphy subsequently tendered his resignation effective November 1, 1945. Ms. Audre Delany, an African American woman and Director of the Boarding Out Department was appointed Interim Superintendent. In December, 1945 with the institution still in violation of state regulations, the following fiscal report was made at a special meeting of the board, at a "*rate of burn of 15k per month, we will exhaust our assets in one year*".

Figure 16. Photo of Ms. Audre Delany holding baby, courtesy of Harlem Dowling-West Side Center

The confluence of negative publicity about the children employed in the rest home and adverse charges against the institution waged by Mr. Offut compounded a dire fiscal situation and were the final contributing factors towards aggressive pursuit of a solution of finding a buyer for the Riverdale site and

conversion to an institution with children who were boarded out as the programmatic base. The board considered four options.

1. *Renovation of the physical plant at a cost of $400k from reserves plus $300k to be raised;*
2. *Close foster homes with 350 children and maintain 167 in institution;*
3. *Sell institution and move to another to site to care for the same number of children;*
4. *Close institution, develop foster home program; establish group homes in various localities with the possibility of developing a modern type small institution to meet the needs of a specific population.*

Even as the board resolved to close the institution, its mission of commitment to improving the wellbeing of dependent Negro children and the betterment of relationships between the races was reflected in the close out plan. A committee was appointed to report back on community need. Further the board resolved to

> *"Develop a good living plan for each child in relation to his particular need… That our interracial policy, which is such an integral part of this agency, be carried in whatever area of activity is undertaken. That careful consideration be given by our Board to the community's needs and how our resources can be used to the greatest advantage.*

Children were moved out of the institution on a staggered basis. Younger residents were boarded out or returned to relatives. Some unrelated respondents boarded out together to the same families or were placed in different homes in the same community.

Mr. Clark and eight other boys were placed in a home in Brooklyn. He also recalled "*six or seven girls were placed in Corona, Queens*". Placement together or in close proximity increased the likelihood of the continuation of their relationships into early adulthood; some entered the military together or provided job leads to one other.

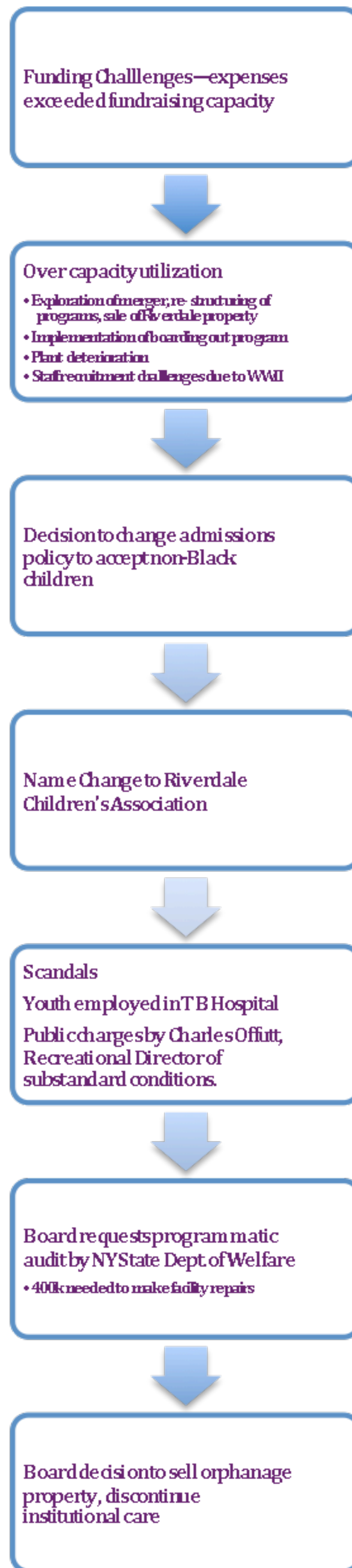
At age 16, Mr. Clark was the last to leave COA. Older children were allowed to stay until the closure of the institution in 1946; some worked during the day and returned to the institution in the evenings. Many study respondents

never returned to the facility after it closed but some came just to see their old *"home"*.

> *"I feel good about that place. I had a wonderful childhood. I am very quick to defend that place. People think that you must have been treated cruelly. Maybe they do it somewhere, but not where I came from.*
>
> *I went there one time to the Jewish Home* (Hebrew Home for the Aged[56])*. I told them I used to live there when I was young. They were so amazed. They sat back and said 'Tell us about it'. I was telling them about the cottages and where we stayed and everything. I was in my glory, talking about my childhood and everything."*
>
> **Mrs. Bernard**

[56] The Hebrew Home for the Aged purchased the Riverdale property from COA and continues to provide non-denominational nursing home and assisted living services for the elderly. A former COA ward that later worked for Hebrew Home, was a resident of the nursing home when he attended the COA reunion hosted at Riverdale under my tenure as Executive Director of Harlem Dowling.

Figure 17. Progression of Events Leading to Orphanage Closure



V. DISCUSSION

The historiographical study of COA re-examined the experience of this now defunct orphanage for Black children in the context of potential lessons for the care of the disproportionate numbers of dependent Black children in today's child welfare system. Narrative data from former residents and archival sources is at times sobering as it unearths the meanings ascribed to the experience of living in COA, the phenomena that helped these youth to develop a positive sense of self in American society. The study's findings challenge many of the negative assumptions held by seasoned child welfare professionals about congregate care and, moreover, suggest new opportunities for reconstructing thought about what can work within congregate care (and for whom).

The Link Between Self And Corporate Identity

Rich COA narrative from the voices of its students, archives and other historical sources supported the study's hypothesis that there was a relationship between how the alumni viewed themselves and the institution's corporate identity. The alumni's voices depict the many ways in which their sense of worth, validation, knowledge of their culture and history was nurtured by the value system of COA and how that value system manifested in agency practices and polity.

The COA mission to serve dependent Black children was evident in board decisions about the population to be served, fundraising, public relations and local and national policy response. As the organization's leadership struggled with the decision to expand their population to include White children, they

grappled with the irony that compliance with regulatory mandates left their targeted population further underserved. Ever vigilant about not publically engaging in the race discourse, COA board members and staff were still catalysts for policy changes for the benefit of Black children, e.g., pressuring other Protestant organizations to be more responsive to the need for beds for Black children and influencing the court's adherence to integration policies.

Like the leadership of New York City's Child Welfare Agencies of Color in the early 21st century, COA persistently infused the concerns of the Black community into child welfare discourse and was the conscience ensuring that these voices were heard. During my early years as Executive Director of Harlem Dowling, my colleague at the one NYC Latino foster care agency and I often served as bookends in child welfare meetings---catalyzing discourse on the need to include the voice of the community in policy, practice and organizational leadership. As leaders of child welfare agencies of color in a system that continues to serve Black and Latino children disproportionately, we were not a critical mass but provided a critical voice. With the support of board relationships and community access, our agencies, like COA, influenced policy in the public and private child welfare sector. For example, we championed the discourse about the value of kinship care, community based placements, engagement of the faith community in child welfare, community partnerships and representation of Blacks and Latinos in key management and board roles. The experiences of our agencies mirrored that of COA.

COA'S inclusion of the Black community in programmatic and fundraising

activities inspired the youth and made them feel that they were special. Exposure to celebrities and other socialites fostered emulation of their talents and broadened the children's perspectives on possibilities for their future. Engaging Black celebrities strengthened the institution's connection to the Black community but brought tensions as well. The community placed expectations on COA to reflect its views, sentiments and to better understand their (Black) issues. The reciprocal relationship with and resultant pressure from the community also impacted COA staffing, board composition and population served. Although the Black community did not spawn COA, there was a healthy tension between the institution and the community. Sometimes fractious, this tension was a catalyst for programmatic and policy responses that were reflective of community input.

The founders and subsequent directors' clear and public commitment to the underserved dependent Black child created an expectation from the Black and Protestant communities that COA serve as a resource for these children; the Black community also pressured COA to include Blacks in governance and staff roles. They were also often the catalysts for integration of programmatic activities with the agenda of the larger Black community, e.g., involvement in Negro Health Week. Historically keen in attuning to issues concerning Black children, White COA directors were influenced by their Black colleagues to learn more about the interests of the Black community by reading the literature and engaging in community forums.

Although this inquiry focuses on a childcare institution, there are parallels to discourse about the merits of segregated schools or designated programs for

other subgroups within child welfare. W. E. B. Dubois (1935) addressed the question of whether there is a need for segregated schools in the United States. Like Billingsley and Giovannoni (1972:5-6) who advised that the child welfare system must have "an historical and a social perspective", Dubois concluded that a good education is more important than whether a child is educated in an integrated or a segregated environment with the following caveat: "*The proper education of any people includes sympathetic touch between teacher and pupil; not simply of the individual taught but of his surroundings and background, and the history of his class and group…the promotion of such extra-curricular activities as will tend to induct the child into life*."

Similarly, in looking at the programmatic needs of another sub-group within child welfare, LGBTQ youth, Mallon (1998) identified the need for environments that provide "the nutrients for integrating one's gay or lesbian identity into all other areas of one's life". This would suggest that for all children, including sub-groups, affirmation and validation of their personal experience best occurs in settings where there is congruence between the sustaining [wider society] environment and the nurturing environment [family, friends, close relationships] (Norton, 1978).

One should not conclude that board engagement in Black communities was purely altruistic; in many ways it was a self-serving, mutual exchange between the institution and the community. For example, children boarded out in the community attended Black churches and the institution was a resource for dependent Black children. Thus, some of these churches provided in-kind and

monetary support to COA. Reciprocally, the COA board made monetary donations to churches attended by children in foster homes. It is that reciprocity of relationship between childcare providers and the Black community that ought to be fostered by organizational and government policy.

The founders of COA and subsequent directors until the late 1930's were White Protestant women. To use an Afrocentric lens in an inquiry on COA seems like an oxymoron. However, the tenets of Afrocentric worldview that focus on looking at the world beyond hegemonious lenses are reflected in the reciprocal relationship between the organization, its mission and the community it chose to serve. This shared responsibility was also manifested in the mutual responsibility instilled in the children on campus and extended to those in military, boarded out or living in the community. The mission focus created a centrality of purpose that not only shaped the COA identity, it contributed to the wards' sense of self as individuals who happen to be Black; not better than others or less than, but valuable human beings.

To ensure that the child welfare system supports children who develop positive self-identities there must be a connection between the system and the consumers creating that a healthy tension that ensures responsiveness to community needs. Providers must be held accountable to the community it serves: government, funders and the Black community (or other sub-group).

Should Congregate Care Be a Part of the Continuum?

Although congregate vs. family foster care as a programmatic response to

the needs of dependent children was not a primary focus of this inquiry, given its contemporary relevance, I would be remiss not to address observations from this study. This inquiry underscores the need for further study about the value of congregate care as a resource within the continuum of care as an alternative for children/youth for whom there are attachment issues or when there are repeated disruptions in family based placements.

The challenges of hiring and maintaining appropriate staffing, and program development responsive to the needs of children and youth existed in COA and continue within current congregate settings. Regulatory oversight and accountability measures governing all forms of foster care, congregate and family care have advanced significantly. The system's focus on safety, health, wellbeing and permanency has also significantly reduced the length of time that children remain in care, although outcomes are not as strong for Black children. Accountability measures guard against abusive placement experiences for children although intermittently they do surface in all forms of care. However, the experiences of COA alumni in boarding homes are still noteworthy for their persistence in current practice.

Several alumni verbalized their misgivings about the closure of the orphanage and their contention that it was a better resource for dependent children than foster boarding homes. The institution provided safety and the assurance that other basic human needs would be met, of particular significance for children coming from uncertain and troubled family settings. There are many proven positives associated with family based placements that are in close

proximity to the child's home environ, and the consequent reduction in the trauma associated with removal. However, the experiences of COA alumni suggest that for some children from troubled backgrounds, the change in environ, predictability of meals, school and shelter, the regularity of routines, relationships with other children who share one's experience, are conducive to positive identity development and adult outcomes.

For some COA alumni, negative feelings about boarding out seemed to be a consequence of emotional or physical abuse suffered in foster homes. Severe corporal punishment, rejection by foster parents, or an in-home status that was inferior to children related by blood, were common refrains. In cases where there were more positive and affirming relationships with foster parents, the emotional toll of being moved from one home to another left scars. Unlike the idealized foster home setting where the child had a sense of permanency when reunification with parents or kin was not possible, COA children often experienced a revolving door between the orphanage and being boarded out; in the current system, the orphanage has been replaced with transience between foster homes often in search of a good fit. As a result some children are left without an emotional anchor.

COA respondents mourned relationships that they thought were going to be permanent but were severed due to unknown factors. Even when the respondents knew why the move occurred, i.e., military enlistment, death or illness of one foster parent, they still express a sense of wonder as to why they could not have been accommodated by the other parent or extended foster

family members. The sense of loss is palpable as alumni retell their experiences of being "sent back" by foster parents as though they were goods being returned to a store because they didn't fit. Like the broken or rejected toys in the movie, Toy Story, their moods only lightened as they reflected on the "sense of belonging" and being anchored in their place at COA. At COA they were not broken rejects, they fit in with all of the other children, valued for who they were.

Some respondents attributed the "rejection" to characteristics such as the way they looked, their behavior or preference given to other children in the home. The internalization of this rejection seemed to be mitigated by the "sense of belonging" provided by life within COA, the role of the institution in identity formation outweighing the negative experiences of being boarded out.

Others who remained with a foster family for an extended period or maintained contact with foster parents after reaching maturity, experienced positive bonds which did not take the place of the connection to their "*home*". The need for "permanent " connections for children who transition out of care is a persistent challenge. Policy efforts to provide supports for youth beyond the age of majority and programmatic efforts to ensure the linking of youth to adult resources that can continue post-discharge are positive responses. COA youth that were boarded out together upon the closure of the home, at least had each other even if relationships were not extended with the foster parent.

Unlike his contemporaries, Mr. J. had markedly negative feelings about the institutional life. Mr. J., who experienced a "normal" family environ while boarded out, found COA life to be un-stimulating and unfulfilling. Conversely,

most respondents described the routines as part of the discipline that was balanced by unstructured playtime, and a free, natural country-like environment. The structured activities fostered internalized discipline and provided a foundation for learning basic academic and trade skills, including the historical contributions of Blacks.

Staff taught pragmatic skills in self-care, self-reliance, interdependence and "like a cold shower" gave the children a dose of reality about how to succeed in an oppressive American society. Sometimes these realities were harsh, like when a child was told that he/she had no history and therefore had to create one. Yet children appreciated the directness and saw it as an expression of "love" unlike their experiences in boarding homes. As Black children growing up in American society where the color of one's skin would always accompany (if not precede) their accomplishments and abilities, and troubled family backgrounds left them bereft of familiar anchors, lacking the supports available to children from less troubled backgrounds, the "cold shower" approach---not coddling, prepared COA youth for "making it". This approach was tempered by the ongoing exposure to celebrities and to staff like Ms. Sargeant who made the children feel valued and special, fueled their aspirations, fostered their resilience and gave them a sense of possibilities. Many of today's youth in child welfare, particularly those who languished in care too long without permanency, are ill-prepared to constructively function in society. They lack basic skills in self-sufficiency and many function as though the "system" owes them something (and then don't take advantage of it). Others in their fear of being on their own, engage in self-

destructive activities that impede their ability to achieve gainful employment or academic credentials. The COA experience suggests that Black youth in care must be provided with the tools, exposed to the possibilities, and at the same time, hear "straight talk" about the need to create their own futures.

At the risk of sounding right-wing, for dependent socially and educationally dis-advantaged children, who might otherwise flounder academically, a structured environment with school on-grounds might provide an opportunity for regular school attendance and the prospect of educational achievements that will increase their vocational options as adults.

Implications For Practice

As in any historical research, this study was limited by the availability of data that has survived poor or non-existent archival practices, damage or loss. New York Historical Library and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and the New York State Library were significant sources of data from board records, news media and private correspondence. However, considerable rich material was identified in the boxes, records and rusted file cabinets or storage boxes of the successor organization, Harlem Dowling-West Side Center. It is from the latter that the preliminary respondents were identified.

Clearly, oral narrative was limited to the serendipity inherent in snowball sampling, i.e., the ability to identify living respondents who met the study's criteria of being Black and living in COA during the period of 1930 to the closing, and being of reasonable mind and body. It also meant that the respondents maintained contact with someone or a source that had knowledge about this

study. By definition, although elderly, these respondents were physically and mentally hardy, suggesting that those who were fragile, died earlier, or perhaps had lives that resulted in hardship, were excluded from the study. It is possible that their perspectives on the experience might have differed. For example, several respondents reflected on their friend, the bugler, Johnny S., who went on to be a championship boxer but whose life ended in a nursing home after a period of incarceration.

Most respondents were living in the tri-state area during the inquiry. However, these led to others along the eastern seaboard and as far away as California. Two distant respondents were interviewed in person, another via telephone. Ironically, an out-of-state interview led to identification of a respondent living in NYC. Some respondents included relatives, i.e., children, nephews and spouses. Not all of these were fruitful sources but others contributed secondary data about their COA relatives or guidance towards other archival sources that contextualized narratives from living alumni. I am grateful to the many who allowed me to enter their homes and their lives, all of whom were eager to contribute to this study.

Similar to Goldstein's (1996) study on the Rochester Jewish Children's Home, respondents to this inquiry often spoke in two voices---one the child, who lived in COA and the other, the more wizened elder reflecting on their experience in the context of life that followed, and often the wellbeing of today's dependent children. Quoting phrases like "it takes a village to raise a child" they lauded the value and positive impact of the multiple relationships that they experienced

within the institution. Several reflected on the value of their experiences in informing today's foster youth and expressed the desire to share those experiences with Harlem Dowling youth. All were deferential to my role as former executive director but also embraced my academic pursuit as a shared achievement. Consistent with an Afrocentric worldview that supports the collective over the individual, COA alumni expressed pride and claimed ownership in my academic success as a Black woman, just as they nurtured and supported each other's successes. This work, this study of their experience, was viewed as a benefit to the COA community and the larger community of children in care.

Like Goldstein, in The Home on Gorham Street and the Voices of Its Children, (1996), I struggled with bringing cohesiveness and closure to this study. Both oral and written narrative expanded into areas beyond the scope of this inquiry. Their depth suggests the opportunity for further analysis for its potential historical contribution to NYC history, African American history, as well as academic scholarship relative child welfare policy and practice. One significant area that merits further discussion is the relevance of the experience of COA alumni in discussions about the value of congregate care for some children. Child welfare history is replete with shifts in policy and consequently practice direction based on changing ideology.

As we embrace the data that supports the current focus on support for fragile families within their home communities, providing the least restrictive environments when placement is needed, the discourse must be broadened. It

must also include the urgency of the special needs of those children/youth with chronically disrupted educational and housing experiences, and for whom there have been fractured and inconsistent relationships with adult caretakers that have impacted their ability to bond in family settings. If not, seemingly cost-effective solutions of eliminating congregate care might only shift the financial burden to other social systems, the least restrictive of which would be unemployment and the chronic inability to be self-sustaining.

> *Foster youth suffer disproportionately from a weak labor market in part because they are low income, minority youth with poor educational attainment—the exact profile of youth losing out in today's economy. But they also suffer because of the unique handicaps of being raised to adulthood by strangers.*
>
> (Fostering Youth, Center for Urban Futures, September, 2011, p. 9)

> *I sincerely believe that the reason Riverdale closed was because it was too effective. They may not have done the bookkeeping correctly but the products that they were turning out were productive people. Today you don't have them. You have prisons and you're not turning out productive people.*
>
> Mr. Everett [57]

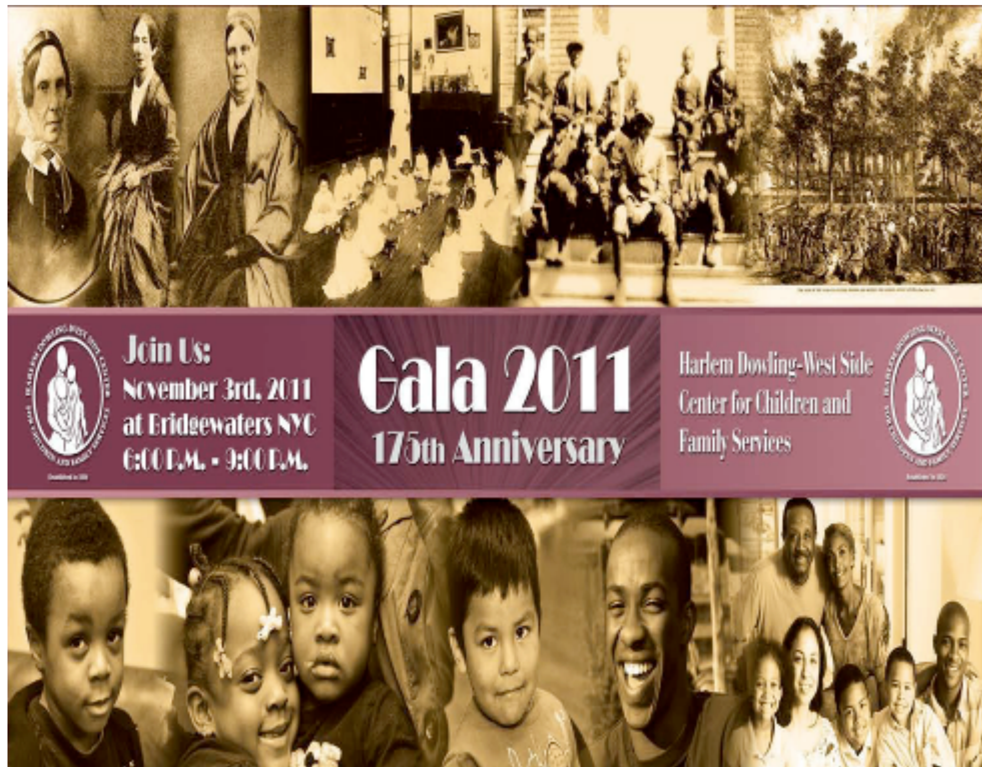


Figure 18. Photo invitation courtesy of Harlem Dowling-West Side Center

VI. APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

<u>Colored Orphan Asylum Interview Guide</u>

The child welfare system in the United States is disproportionately made up of African American children. These children are cared for largely in public or private institutions that were not designed specifically for the care of African American children. There are few existing institutions like the Colored Orphan Asylum, which was founded in 1836 to care for African American children. The institution later expanded to serve other children in the 1930's, changing its name to the Riverdale Children's Association in the early 1940's. This study seeks to add to child welfare knowledge by exploring the ways in which care was provided to African American children in an organization created for them drawing on the lived experiences of alumni from the orphanage. Further, the study will explore the meanings the alumni's attached to their experiences and how these contributed to their development as African Americans adults.

Institutional Life

(These questions will focus on the routine and non-routine activities and environment in the orphanage.)

1. At the time that you lived in RCA most Black children who were orphaned, placed or removed from their families, were placed in RCA. Describe what the experience was like of living in an institution for Black children.
2. Walk me through a regular day or week at RCA. **Probe**: Describe routine activities i.e., how the days were structured. What was a good day like? What was a bad day like?
3. What was different about special days at RCA e.g., visitors, holidays, events.
4. Were there things (aspects) about the institution that let you know that it was an institution for Black children? **Probe**: events, cultural or religious activities, celebrations, staffing, décor, etc.
5. Describe any special days that were related to Black events or holidays? **Probe**: What about those days made them special for you?
6. There was an orphanage for white children up the road. As far as you know, were there things about that orphanage that were different from things at RCA? Talk about some of those differences and what they meant to you when you were a child.

Relationships

Explore meanings attributed to relationships formed while in the orphanage

- Think back to your experience with other children, how would you describe your relationships with them i.e., what you did together, bonds, role models.
- Describe any of these relationships that continued after you left the orphanage i.e., what you did together, how long relationship persisted, whether relationship continues today.
- Were there ways in which these relationships helped shape the person you are today? Probe: In what ways?
- What about the staff---how would you describe your relationships with the staff? Describe any special relationship (good or bad) with a staff person(s). **Probe**: What made the relationship special? Race, culture, personal qualities.
- Were there any special relationships that you had with staff that were not Black? **Probe**: In what ways were these relationships special? What about the individual contributed to that relationship being special? Describe how these relationships contributed to the person you became?
- What about Black staff, were there any relationships that you had that you would call special? **Probe**: In what ways were those relationships special? What about the person made the relationship special? How did the person(s) contribute to the person you became?
- Were there things about your relationship with Black staff that was different from your relationship with other staff?
- Were there things that were the same?
- Were there relationships with staff that continued after you left the orphanage? Describe these relationships i.e., frequency and intimacy of contacts.
- Were there ways in which these relationships helped shape the adult you became?

Black Community

Explore the connection between the orphanage and the Black community.

A. The orphanage was physically located away from a Black community. Describe what it was like when you went outside the orphanage to visit the Black community. **Probe**: Where you went, what you did, and what the experience meant to you.

VII. Were there regular activities that you participated in within the Black community? **Probe:** Walk me through a typical activity that you had in the Black community/

VIII. What about visitors to the orphanage? Who were some of the Blacks from the outside that visited the orphanage? **Probe**: what they did with the children and what did that mean to you at the time?

IX. Describe an occasion when an “important “Black visitor came to the orphanage. Think back to how that visit affected you as a child.

X. Were there other ways in which you felt connected to the Black community?

XI. How did that connection or lack of connection affect you at the time?

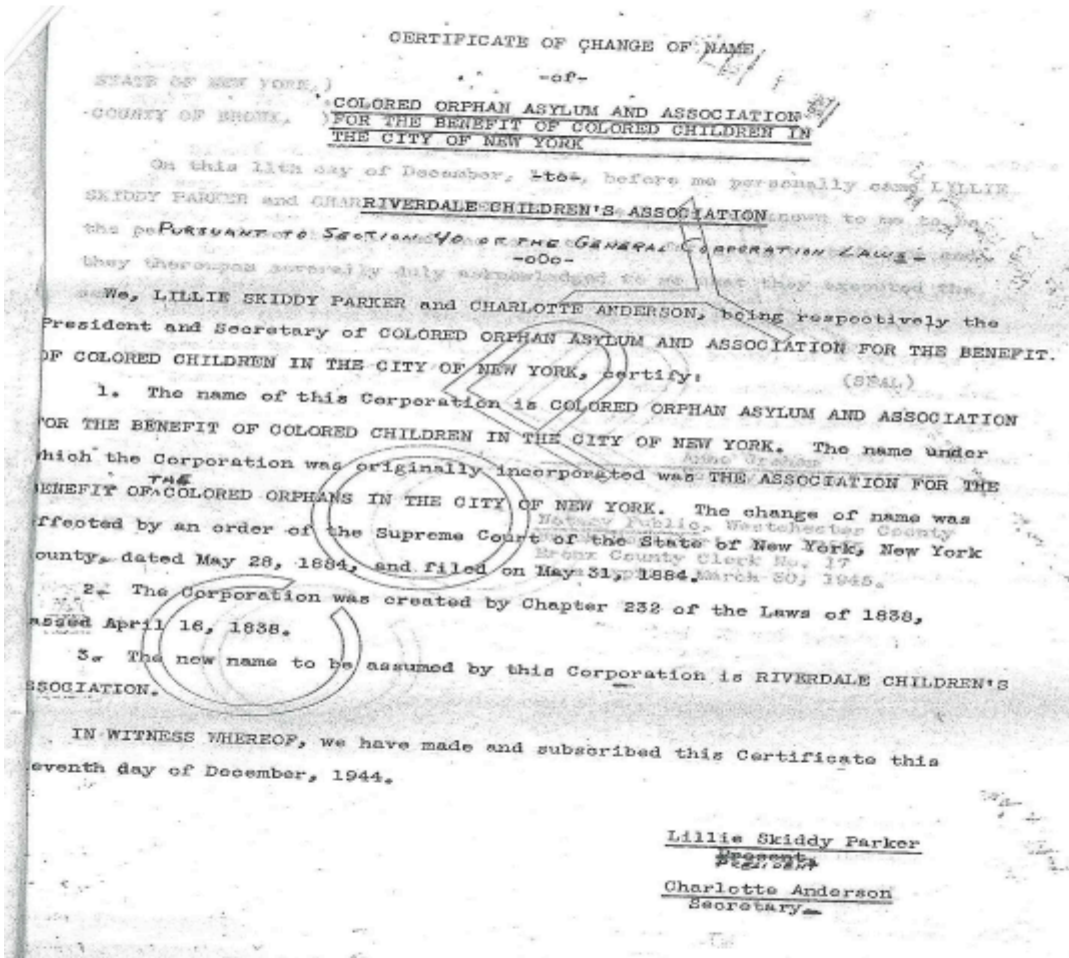
Overall

A. We have talked about the institution itself, relationships with other young people and staff and the connection between the orphanage and the Black community. Is there anything else that you would like to share that would help me to better understand the experience of living in this institution created for Black children or how it impacted your development into an African American adult? Probe: Educational experience, routines, etc.

Thank you for your participation. You have been very helpful. I hope that I can contact you again if I need to clarify any of your responses.

Appendix B

Figure 19. Certificate of Name Change of COA to Riverdale Children's Association 12/07/44



CERTIFICATE OF CHANGE OF NAME

-of-

COLORED ORPHAN ASYLUM AND ASSOCIATION FOR THE BENEFIT OF COLORED CHILDREN IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

RIVERDALE CHILDREN'S ASSOCIATION

PURSUANT TO SECTION 40 OF THE GENERAL CORPORATION LAWS

-oOo-

We, LILLIE SKIDDY PARKER and CHARLOTTE ANDERSON, being respectively the President and Secretary of COLORED ORPHAN ASYLUM AND ASSOCIATION FOR THE BENEFIT OF COLORED CHILDREN IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK, certify:

1. The name of this Corporation is COLORED ORPHAN ASYLUM AND ASSOCIATION FOR THE BENEFIT OF COLORED CHILDREN IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK. The name under which the Corporation was originally incorporated was THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE COLORED ORPHANS IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK. The change of name was effected by an order of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, New York County, dated May 28, 1884, and filed on May 31, 1884.

2. The Corporation was created by Chapter 232 of the Laws of 1838, passed April 16, 1838.

3. The new name to be assumed by this Corporation is RIVERDALE CHILDREN'S ASSOCIATION.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we have made and subscribed this Certificate this seventh day of December, 1944.

Lillie Skiddy Parker
President

Charlotte Anderson
Secretary

Appendix C

Figure 20. Deed for plot at Kensico Cemetary purchased by COA in 1901 with burials of former residents who expired up to 1961, courtesy of Harlem Dowling-West Side Center for Children and Family Services.

This Indenture, made the 6th day of May in the year of our Lord, one thousand nine hundred and one between **The Kensico Cemetery,** a corporation incorporated under and pursuant to the laws of the State of New York, party of the first part, and Colored Orphan Asylum and Association for the Benefit of Colored Children, New York City party of the second part.

Witnesseth, That the party of the first part in consideration of Two hundred and forty ($240.00/100) Dollars to it paid by the party of the second part, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged does hereby grant, bargain, sell and convey to the said party of the second part, its successors and assigns, as a place of burial for the dead, the use of, a lot of land, in the Cemetery of the said Corporation, called "The Kensico Cemetery," situated in the Town of Mount Pleasant, Westchester County, (and State of New York,) which lot is delineated and laid down on the Register Map of the said cemetery, in the possession of the party of the first part, and therein designated by the number 1111 in section 36 containing 600 superficial feet.

Katahdin Plot

To have and to hold the use of the above granted premises to the said party of the second part, its successors and assigns, forever; subject, however, to the conditions and restrictions contained in the rules and regulations annexed hereto. **And** the said party of the first party hereby covenants to and with the said party of the second part, its successors and assigns, that the party of the first part is lawfully seized of the herein above granted premises in fee simple; that it has good right to sell and convey the use of the same for the purposes above expressed.

RULE 3.- All Lots enclosures of any kind whatever are prohibited.
RULE 4.- No Corner Stones are allowed exceeding two inches in height above the ground.
RULE 5.- An order in writing is required from the Lot Owners whenever a grave is to be opened.

In testimony whereof, the said party of the first part has caused this Deed to be signed by its President and Treasurer, and its corporate seal to be hereunto affixed the day and year first above written.

In presence of

Reese Carpenter

James F. Sutton, President.

Samuel Knight, Treasurer.

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