

Philanthropy and “poor” families in Los Angeles, 1910-1950s

AUTHOR

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This research focused on how philanthropic endeavours affected poor, unwed mothers in Los Angeles from 1910-1950, focusing on the Florence Critterton Home. My role in this research consisted of supporting Dr Amanda Sheely as a research assistant through the LSE US Phelan Centre.

INTRODUCTION

This research sought to understand the relationship between the state and the marginalised. In this case, the marginalised were young and unwed mothers. However, I found out that philanthropy played a huge part, e.g some mothers “surrendering” their children to the Florence Critterton Home.



Mostly white, middle-class teens and young women were systematically shamed, hidden in maternity homes and then coerced into handing over their children to adoption agencies without being informed of their legal rights (Washington Post)

METHODOLOGY

The archival research consisted of archival research, from the LA Public library based on meeting minutes, reports, and memos from the 1910s-1950s. The

As a historical project, it was important for me to immerse myself in the context of early 20th century LA.

FINDINGS

- Research demographics at the time were mainly young white women (15-20)
- Research indicated that state supervision was minimal in comparison to philanthropic endeavours (e.g Florence Critterton Home with parenting classes)

CONCLUSION

- White babies were seen as more valuable and thus, more likely to be adopted
- Although the premise of the home was to “support” young mothers, many of these girls ended up “surrendering” their children to the home
- African American girls had different experiences and were perceived to be more promiscuous than their white counterparts
- Reflections: Roe v Wade, bodily autonomy, language around these young mothers



Credit: Digital Collections of the Los Angeles Public Library & Missouri Valley Special Collections

RELATED LITERATURE

Morton, M. J. (1988). Fallen Women, Federated Charities, and Maternity Homes, 1913-1973. *Social Service Review*, 62(1), 61–82. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30011947>