

Takin' You to School:

Issues in Education from a Historical Prospective

AHTC Summer Institute Lesson—2009

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Part 4: Alternative School Settings

Primary Source: Photographs of students at the Geneva Girls' Reformatory; ca. 1920; Illinois Superintendent of Public Instruction; Illinois State Archives, Springfield, IL.

Description: These five photographs provide glimpses into the experiences of girls in a reform school. Three show the students engaged in various activities and two depict the learning atmosphere.

Prompts:

- Picture 1 (Beverly Cottage):
 - How would you describe the Geneva Girls' Reformatory?
 - Why is the entrance to the reformatory important?
 - How would you feel walking into this learning environment?
 - Is this different from most schools that you have seen?
 - How would girls (who have dropped out of school or gotten into trouble) respond to this type of atmosphere?

- Picture 2 (Library):
 - What skills could be developed here?
 - Would this room be conducive for learning?
 - Would many of these girls have experienced a library setting before?
 - In your opinion, can anyone learn if given the opportunity and proper tools?

- Picture 3 (Working in the Garden):
 - What skills are developed when gardening?
 - Who do you think would be the typical girl in the reformatory? Would she have had experiences in the fields?
 - What other gains would be made by having the girls engaging in strenuous work?
 - How and why should alternative schools be different from regular ones?

- Picture 4 (Practicing Millinery):
 - What skills would the girls develop here?

- What type of hats do you see?
- Describe the girls pictured working here?
- How are they dressing the part?
- What does this picture (and the previous) say about the learning done there?
- What does it say about the type of people running the school?
- What types of activities would boys have engaged in at reform schools?
- What types of skills and educational experiences should our alternative schools provide today?
- Picture 5 (Saluting the Flag):
 - Describe the girls pictured here?
 - What does their dress imply about the character that the school is attempting to develop?
 - Why would patriotism be an important value to instill?
 - Given that many young people in reform schools were sons and daughters of first generation immigrants, why is this especially important?
 - Would this type of “Americanization” cause any tension at home?
 - Do our schools today teach students to be patriotic?
 - Why should reform schools have this as a special focus?

Enrichment:

Students can research alternative schools or reform programs in the area (Lincoln’s Challenge). How does their atmosphere compare to Geneva Girls’ Reformatory?