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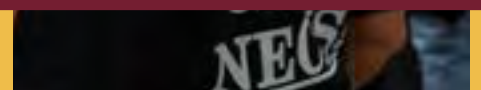
a comprehensive look at a prevalent child welfare issue



Safety



Permanency



Well-Being

Confronting Racism | Engaging Partners | Finding Solutions
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Harm Reduction to Transformation, History and A New Path Forward

Michael Finley and Samantha Mellerson

Since the W. Haywood Burns Institute (BI) was established nearly 20 years ago, we have observed an increasing number of appointed and elected officials and human service sector leaders begrudgingly accept the presence of racial and ethnic disparities. In practice these systems function not as integrated systems but as semi-autonomous agencies which interact and impact the lives of people of color across the nation. For example, data indicates that young people of color are disproportionately

90% decrease in the indigenous population over a century. This tragedy and the legacy of slavery serve as a historical backdrop to the development of the human service systems within which we work today.

During the Industrialization Revolution in the 1800s, child advocates observed large numbers of unsupervised children in crowded cities (Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, n.d.; Longely, 2020). This led to reforms such as Houses of Refuge and the Orphan Train

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involved at key decision points throughout the child welfare sector (Kids Count Data Center, Children in Foster Care by Race and Hispanic Origin in the United States, 2021). In response, many jurisdictions established collaborative bodies composed of system decision makers, and in some cases community partners, and engaged in years of reform to reduce the harm caused by these systems.

Yet even with these traditional harm reduction reforms, racial and ethnic disparities continue to exist at key decision points within these systems. Thus, while harm reduction efforts represent a critical step in eliminating racial and ethnic disparities, the BI is pushing our partners to raise the bar for our children and families. They, and frankly, we, need transformational change. For the BI, achieving transformation requires engaging a structural well-being framework—a system of public policies, institutional and inclusive practices, cultural representations, and other norms that provide families and communities what they need to thrive, namely a sense of belonging, a sense of community, and equitable access to the resources necessary for positive life outcomes. Importantly, this structural well-being framework is in direct contrast to the nation's current operational framework of structural racism.

For the BI, achieving transformation also requires system and community partners to establish a shared historical competence regarding how the history of structural racism has impacted the development of human services systems. We believe that anchoring our current work context in the truth of our shared history is imperative to eliminating structural racism and taking steps to radically reimagine and redesign community centered alternative systems and solutions for well-being.

As we consider current day disparities within human service, we must acknowledge the destructive European presence that led to the theft indigenous lands and an 80% to

Movement. Houses of Refuge, the first youth reformatories, provided youth with a safe space where they could learn a vocation, etiquette, and other skills. The Orphan Train movement, a precursor to modern-day foster care, resulted in young people, some orphans and some merely poor, being removed from their homes, often without parental consent, and placed with farming families in the Midwest and Southwest. While these were considered liberal policies, the forced separation of families reflects a destructive theme that we have witnessed through history, including today at the country's southern border. Further, amidst the backdrop of legal segregation and explicitly racist policies, people of color still were often excluded from many of the benefits of these reforms.

As the nation moved into the 1900s, there was an increase in the number of private and government entities devoted to protecting abused and neglected youth. While this appeared to be progress, policies and practices within the human services space still reflected the discriminatory and racist sentiments that were pervasive throughout broader society. For example, in the late 1800s and early 1900s eugenics was a normalized school of thought taught in academia and supported by powerful segments in our society including Woodrow Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt, and members of the Rockefeller family who supported dehumanizing racist policies to the detriment of people of color.

As the human service sector expanded throughout the 1900s, race and ethnicity continued to impact policies and practices within child welfare. The 1980s and '90s reflected a particularly destructive period of time as the war on drugs led to the violent extraction of unprecedented numbers of people of color from their communities into youth detention and adult prisons. The war on drugs and the resulting punitive policies led to the overrepresentation of youth of color in the child welfare and youth justice systems.

The journey to transformation requires that we all recognize that current racial and ethnic disparities are inextricably linked to and reflect our nation's history of structural racism. To overcome this history and achieve structural well-being, we must acknowledge that systems are operating as they were designed: Human service systems were intended to provide social control of the poor and people of color. Historical competence provides us with a narrative anchored in truth as we move toward a values-based process led by voices centered in community and guided by the expertise of individuals and communities most impacted by the problems we seek to resolve.

Michael Finley is executive director at W. Haywood Burns Institute. Contact: mfinley@burnsinstitutue.org

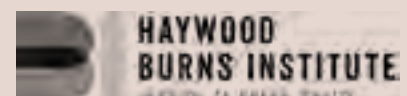
Samantha Mellerson is executive director at W. Haywood Burns Institute. Contact: smellerson@burnsinstitute.org



Who is W. Haywood Burns?

W. Haywood Burns Institute (BI) is named for the late W. Haywood Burns, who was a beacon of light to those who believe the battle for human rights and justice can be won through activism, humility and dedication.

A Black-led national nonprofit working to transform justice by challenging racial hierarchy and the social control of communities of color by the justice sector and other public systems, BI employs strategies and tactics to establish a community-centered approach to structural well-being, a reimagined system of public policies, institutional and inclusive practices, cultural representations, and other norms that work to strengthen family, community and individual well-being for positive life outcomes.



Visit www.burnsinstitute.org to learn more.