Abstract

**FLIGHT, FRIGHT, AND FREEDOM: The Criminalization of Black Boys at the Illinois Training School for Boys at St. Charles, 1920-1950**

This article will explore how changes in the racial demography of Chicago shaped the evolution of a juvenile justice institution in Illinois. The State School for Boys at St. Charles, an institution where the Juvenile Court sent boys that were labeled ‘delinquent’, was born of the Progressive child-saving movement. As the number of boys who were sent to the institution increased as a result of racial discrimination in child welfare agencies and the Great Migration, residents in towns surrounding the school, school administrators, state legislators, and the public at large constructed and rearticulated lines between whose children who could be rehabilitated and those who could not. This resulted in a successful political assault on the rehabilitative ideal and the state’s construction of its first maximum security youth prison for the “different sort” of boy who was to dangerous to be housed at St. Charles. By the 1930s, the Training School for Boys at St. Charles became an institution of symbolic importance for Black Chicagoans. It became a site through which they demanded recognition of their children’s vulnerability, as well as their own humanity.