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# The Forgotten Children:

# Mapping a National Legacy of Youth Who Died in Custody

THE FORGOTTEN CHILDREN INITIATIVE

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# The Forgotten Children:
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# Introduction

When the Forgotten Children Initiative launched in February 2026, burial sites associated with children who died in youth institutions were confirmed in only a small number of states. These included the burial ground at Maryland's House of Reformation & Instruction for Colored Children, where research indicates that more than 230 children were buried, and burial sites associated with Florida's Dozier School for Boys and a largely overlooked burial site associated with the New York Training School for Girls in Hudson, New York.

The Initiative set out to ask a larger question: **How widespread was this history, and how many children who died in the custody of youth institutions were buried at or near the places where they were held?**

**Research to date has identified 40 burial sites associated with youth across in 29 states**—more than half of the states in the nation—revealing a national legacy of children who died in custody and whose lives and deaths were largely lost from the nation's historical record. **Across those sites, research has identified over 1,000 children who died while in the custody** of state funded institutions and were buried at or near the institutions where they were held. The findings show that the stories uncovered in Florida, Maryland and New York were not isolated tragedies, but rather part of a much larger national history.

The institutions represented in the research span over two centuries. In some cases, the institutions where children died—or successor institutions on the same sites—remain in operation today.

The research is continuing and additional findings will be reported in the future.

# Background

In 2023, leadership at the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) initiated an effort to research and document the history of the Department, particularly its secure facilities, as well as the broader history of juvenile justice in Maryland. Through archival research the agency documented racially segregated facilities, patterns of labor exploitation, physical abuse, and operational deficiencies and inequities at what was known as the House of Reformation and Instruction for Colored Children (1870-1937), a Black-only reform school.[1] DJS currently operates the Cheltenham Youth Detention Center, a successor facility to the House of Reformation.

Legally established in 1870 by the Maryland General Assembly[2], the House of Reformation in Cheltenham, Maryland was the first reform school for delinquent Black children in the American South.[3] Prior to its opening, Black youth, some as young as five years old, were sent to adult jails and state prisons for criminal offenses, delinquent acts and status offender behavior such as running away from home. The House of Reformation admitted its first children in 1873, six years after Mayland abolished slavery, and two decades after the House of Refuge for Juvenile Delinquents, the reform school for delinquent White children, was established.[4]

Children were sent to the House of Reformation for reasons including:

- Poverty or homelessness
- Being orphaned or semi-orphaned
- Accusations of minor offenses
- Lacking an adult deemed “fit”, often referred to as a “minor without proper care”

Through a former DJS staff member who had worked at Cheltenham for over 40 years (and whose father had worked there for 40 years before him), DJS leaders learned that children who had died at the facility had been buried in an area adjacent to the House of Reformation. Subsequent research and on-site exploration in October 2024 confirmed the existence of the burial site.

The burial ground has at least two sections, both located in heavily wooded areas adjacent to an official and well-maintained cemetery for Maryland veterans operated by Maryland’s Department of Veterans and Military Affairs (DVMF). The first section dates from the late 19th century and has seven visible headstones that mark the burials of named boys ranging in age from 11 to 21 years old who died between 1885 and 1888. The second section located by DJS staff dates from the early 20th century and contains rows of cinder blocks that mark the graves of House of Reformation youth but provide no identifying information. Surveyors in 2009 estimated that there were approximately 100 cinder block markers.[5] Subsequent investigation by The Washington Post indicates that 230 or more boys are likely buried on the site.[6]

[1] The research was conducted primarily by Crystal Foretia, a policy and legislative staff at DJS through a Govern for America Fellowship, under the supervision of Marc Schindler, then Assistant Secretary & Chief of Staff at DJS.

[2] Maryland Department of Juvenile Services. (2025, June). A separate and unequal system: Understanding the early history of youth incarceration in Maryland. https://djs.maryland.gov/media/692

[3] Maryland Department of Juvenile Services. (2025, June). A separate and unequal system.

[4] Maryland Department of Juvenile Services. (2025, June). A separate and unequal system.

[5] Maryland Department of Juvenile Services. (2025, June). A separate and unequal system.

[6] Mettler, K. & Brice-Saddler, M. (2025, September 22). 230 dead Black boys. A ‘secret cemetery.’ Officials knew, and didn’t act. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2025/09/22/house-of-reformation-graveyard/

Following discovery of the burial site, the Department initiated planning for a number of activities to restore, recognize, and maintain the House of Reformation burial site, with the goal of affording Black youth who had died (or been killed) and buried, the dignity and humanity they and their families deserve, and to implement a healing process to atone for the harms caused by the State of Maryland. These planned activities included:

- surveying the cemetery through ground penetrating radar to find out exactly how many boys were buried there and the locations of where they are buried;
- restoring and properly maintaining the area so that it is an official cemetery with markers identifying the boys buried there;
- making efforts to locate and communicate with living relatives of the boys;
- working in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) to erect historical markers that acknowledge the segregationist history of DJS's two oldest facilities, Charles H. Hickey, Jr. School and Cheltenham Youth Detention Center;
- and partnering with non-profit groups and hopefully family members to recognize the existence and history of the cemetery, creating the possibilities for a restorative process to address the harms committed to the children buried at House of Reformation burial site and their families.

The overall goal was to properly honor the youth who died or were killed at the House of Reformation and are buried at the site, and provide a more holistic and accurate understanding of the racial inequities that plagued the system dating to the 1800s in order to place in context the racial inequities that we see today and help with efforts to reduce these inequities moving forward.

Understanding that state government is often reluctant to pursue these types of activities (as was the case in Florida, where efforts to uncover the history of boys buried at the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys were resisted by state and local government), the Department hoped to partner with a nonprofit group and possibly an academic institution. Such partnerships would enable organizations and individuals outside of the government to advocate for the work, regardless of whether state government continued to pursue or prioritize the project.

In addition, because it was unclear whether the State would prioritize and pursue any of these activities, in June 2025 former DJS officials took steps to ensure the burial site was acknowledged and to also try to encourage related reforms for which DJS had been advocating, particularly to reduce the number of youth prosecuted in the adult criminal justice system.[7]

Specifically, information about the burial ground and the Maryland General Assembly's establishment of the House of Reformation to remove Black youth from adult jails and prisons was shared with a Maryland legislator. In July 2025 during a visit to the burial site Senator Will Smith, Chair of the Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee announced that he would re-file his auto-waiver legislation and hold hearings related to the burial site and the state's segregationist history. The visit and announcement resulted in extensive national and local news coverage.[8]

[7] Schindler, M. (2025, September 2). Maryland must reckon with its juvenile justice past to protect today's youth. The Afro. https://www.afro.com/baltimore-news/maryland-juvenile-justice-reform-a3a01f9c/; Schiraldi, V. (2025, October 24). Finding the racist roots of Maryland's juvenile justice system. The Marshall Project. https://www.themarshallproject.org/2025/10/24/maryland-juvenile-justice-black-prison-graveyard; Schiraldi, V. & Schindler, M. (2025, November 11). Unburying the segregationist history of Maryland's youth justice system. Maryland Matters. https://marylandmatters.org/2025/11/11/unburying-the-segregationist-history-of-marylands-youth-justice-system/

[8] Mettler, K. (2025, July 17). Graves near site of Maryland reform school for Black children rediscovered. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2025/07/17/maryland-cheltenham-cemetery-youth-prison/

Further, after leaving DJS in July 2025, Marc Schindler (former Assistant Secretary & Chief of Staff of DJS) conducted initial research to determine whether the three burial sites associated with youth institutions of which he was aware–Maryland's House of Reformation for Colored Children, Florida's Dozier School for Boys and a largely overlooked burial site associated with the New York Training School for Girls in Hudson, New York–represented isolated cases or were part of a broader trend.[9] That initial research suggested that similar burial sites might exist in as many as twenty states across the country.

With this preliminary information, Georgetown University's Center for Youth Justice decided to create The Forgotten Children Initiative, which launched in February 2026.[10] One of the Initiative's primary activities has been to investigate and document burial grounds and cemeteries for incarcerated youth at sites across the country.The Forgotten Children Initiative is a national public scholarship project focused on unearthing the lives behind the lost burial sites of incarcerated youth. Through historical research, genealogy, family engagement, public history and memorialization, the Initiative seeks to recover the identities and stories of children who died in institutional custody, reconnect them with their families and communities, and share this history in support of efforts to reform current youth justice and child welfare systems serving youth and families.

# Brief History of Reform Schools for Youth

Beginning in the early and mid-19th century, reformers in the United States increasingly argued that children should not be housed in adult jails and prisons.[11] Influenced by ideas about childhood, education, moral reform, and the possibility of rehabilitation, these reformers promoted separate institutions for young people who were considered delinquent, neglected, or otherwise in need of correction.[12]

The first reformatories and "houses of refuge" were established with an explicitly rehabilitative mission. Rather than simply punishing children, these institutions were intended to discipline, educate, train and morally reform them. Children were often removed from adult jails and prisons and placed in institutions that promised schooling, vocational training, religious instruction, and structured environments.[13] The New York House of Refuge, which opened in 1825, was specifically established as an alternative to placing children with adult prisoners and was intended to provide education, shelter, discipline and reform.[14]

[[9] Schindler, M. & and Schiraldi, V. (2026, March 22). The racist roots of youth justice are buried deep. The Imprint. https://imprintnews.org/opinion/the-racist-roots-of-youth-justice-are-buried-deep/273246

[10] Brice-Sattler, M. and Mettler, K. (2025, December 10). Search begins to find families of Black boys buried at abandoned Md. site. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2025/12/10/maryland-cemetery-house-of-reformation/; Schindler & Schiraldi. (2026, March 22). The racist roots of youth justice are buried deep.

[11] Fox, S. J. (1970). Juvenile justice reform: An historical perspective. Stanford Law Review, 22(6), 1187–1239. https://doi.org/10.2307/1227960

[12] Fox, S. J. (1970). Juvenile justice reform: An historical perspective.

[13] Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice. (n.d.). America's juvenile justice history. https://www.cjcj.org/legacy-impact/juvenile-justice-history

[14] Pickett, R. S. (1969). House of Refuge: Origins of juvenile reform in New York State, 1815-1857. Syracuse University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv64h7hd; Fox, S. J. Juvenile justice reform: An historical perspective.

But the reality frequently fell far short of the promise. Many reform schools became highly regimented and punitive institutions in which children were subjected to forced labor, corporal punishment, isolation, inadequate food and medical care, overcrowding, and other forms of abuse. The work regimen was an important feature of many institutions, and historical reviews document the deterioration of conditions and the use of children's labor for institutional revenue. Investigations and later scholarship also documented substantial abuse and failures of rehabilitation.[15] Children could be confined for lengthy or indeterminate periods, sometimes for relatively minor offenses or behavior that today would typically not be treated as criminal. The distinction between "rehabilitation" and punishment often became blurred.[16]

The experience was also profoundly shaped by race, class and gender. Black children and other marginalized youth were often confined in separate institutions. By the late 19th century, many states operated separate institutions for boys and girls and, in some jurisdictions, racially segregated facilities.[17] Girls were frequently subject to institutional intervention for conduct defined in terms of morality, sexuality, family circumstances, or "incorrigibility," in addition to conventional delinquency offenses.[18]

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the United States had developed a broad network of houses of refuge, reform schools, training schools, industrial schools and juvenile reformatories. The terminology changed over time, as did the institutions themselves, but the underlying tension remained: institutions established in the name of rehabilitation could become places where children experienced severe deprivation and abuse.[19]

Unfortunately, too often these types of dangerous and abusive conditions are still seen in modern day youth corrections facilities, where systemic or recurring abuses were documented in the state-funded youth correctional facilities of 29 states and the District of Columbia between 2000 and 2015.[20] In addition, since 2015 reports of serious abuses in youth incarceration facilities have continued, including in Florida, New Hampshire, and Texas, among other states. Surveys of currently or previously incarcerated youth also reveal that many have been abused physically or sexually in their facilities by staff or peers, and that most have witnessed abuses – often repeatedly. [21]

[15] Shelden, R. G. Shelden. (2009). From Houses of Refuge to "Youth Corrections": Same story, different day. https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/houses-refuge-youth-corrections-same-story-different-day-0; Ward, G. K. (2012). The Black child-savers: Racial democracy and juvenile justice. University of Chicago Press.

[16] S. Schlossman. (1995). Delinquent children: The juvenile reform school. In Morris, N. & Rothman, D. J. (Eds.), The Oxford history of the prison: The practice of punishment in Western society (pp. 329-249). Oxford University Press.

[17] B. Krisberg. (1996). Historical legacy of juvenile corrections.

[18] S. Schlossman. (1995). Delinquent children: The juvenile reform school.

[19] Ward, G. K. (2012). The Black child-savers.

[20] R, Mendel. (2023). *Why youth incarceration fails: An updated review of the evidence*. The Sentencing Project. https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/why-youth-incarceration-fails-an-updated-review-of-the-evidence/

[21] R, Mendel. (2023). Why youth incarceration fails: An updated review of the evidence.

# Methodology

## Scope

The scope of this research encompasses identifying the burial locations of children who died in state custody after being confined in correctional institutions within the United States, and whose remains were not returned to their families or communities upon death. We define youth as individuals younger than 21—the most common upper age limit for remaining under the jurisdiction of a juvenile court and in a youth prison, though some states set their cutoff for admittance to a youth prison to 18 years or even 16 years of age. Institutional death counts exclude deceased children who were not incarcerated—typically the children of prison staff or infants born in the institutions. We define a prison as a state-run or state-contracted facility to which a child could be sent following a court disposition or sentence. This definition encompasses both facilities designed specifically for children and facilities for people of all ages to which children were sent.

As such, two notable types of government-run facilities fall outside of the bounds of this study: federally-run Native American boarding schools and state schools for youths with intellectual or developmental disabilities, often called schools for the "feeble-minded." These institutions did not always operate separately from the juvenile justice system, as children were sometimes exchanged between them,[20] but further research is needed to determine the extent of the interaction between these different types of institutions.

## Criteria

This map shows places where the Forgotten Children Initiative is confident that children have been buried. For a site to be included in the map, one of three types of evidence is needed: archeological confirmation of buried remains; contemporary records indicating a place of burial (death certificate, burial permit, obituary, etc.); or witness accounts of deaths, burials, cemeteries, or otherwise suspicious disappearances of children who had been incarcerated.

[20] Prout, K. (2025, March 26). The ghosts of Geneva's 'home for wayward girls.' Chicago Reader. https://chicagoreader.com/news/feature-news-politics/illinois-school-prison-history-girls/

# Sources

During our research, we have worked to use the most accurate, up-to-date, and credible sources available. Gravesite locations and their death counts are in most cases compiled from Find a Grave, an open source online database owned by Ancestry.com, which compiles available burial information worldwide. Supplementary information from prison reports, news articles, interviews with formerly incarcerated children and staff, and burial ground investigations is used to adjust initial estimations where available. When sources contradict each other regarding burial counts, we display whichever number is most recent and most conservative. An initial list of potential burial sites identified through online research was then expanded by research utilizing AI, though research efforts have gone beyond its capabilities. A full list of sources is available at the end of this document.

# Demographics

Because the demographics of children incarcerated in youth institutions changed over time, demographic categorization is necessarily imperfect. Where multiple descriptors of an institution's racial or gender makeup apply, preference is given to the descriptor that best describes the population of children who are known to have died at the institution. Where information is unknown, the widest possible descriptor has been used ("Integrated" for race, "Co-ed" for gender) to best account for the lack of information without making assumptions that skew demographic data.

# Descriptions

The descriptions of each institution are based on available historical information. They are designed to give contextual information about the institutions and provide information about the experiences of the children held within them. These narratives are not disconnected from the current juvenile legal system, where 31,871 children were incarcerated in the United States as of 2023 (the most recent year for which data is available),[1] and many of the institutions where children died and were buried remain open.

[21] Nam-Sonenstein, B., & Sawyer, W. (2025, August 25). Youth confinement: The whole pie 2025. Prison Policy Initiative. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/youth2025.html

# Research Findings

***As of this publication in September 2026,* research has identified 40 youth institutions in 29 states where incarcerated youth died and were buried in sites associated with an institution where children were incarcerated.** Thus far we have identified over 1,000 children buried at these sites across the country. In most cases, the gravesite is located on the grounds of the facility, but some institutions contracted with local cemeteries, which provided a reserved space for burials of incarcerated youth.

The most common cause of death listed for incarcerated children is disease, with tuberculosis, or "consumption," being most common. Deaths from disease tended to decrease over time as medical technology improved and vaccines drastically reduced the mortality rates of many childhood diseases. The next most frequent cause of death appears to be violence and neglect on the part of facility staff. Most, if not all, institutions engaged in corporal punishment as an accepted disciplinary practice, and cases of physical and sexual abuse were common. In some cases, children were killed during alleged attempts to run away from the institution. Other times, cases of sickness and injury were ignored until they, too, became fatal. Institutional causes of death are particularly high among non-White children. There are cases of fatal violence between incarcerated children, but they seem to be rare. Other causes of death are not as commonplace but include suicides, workplace accidents, and fires.

The conditions surrounding the deaths and burials of children may not be the most effective measure of overall facility conditions, as the data only includes children who are buried at or near the facility, a factor correlated with several other conditions that could impact the data. For example, perhaps families are less likely to retrieve remains if they are poorer, which simultaneously leads to worse health outcomes. This endogeneity creates difficulties for practical applications of our data in a research context that should not be overlooked. Further, institutional records are imperfect and incomplete and in many cases, especially at facilities for Black children, school staff likely had an incentive to lie about true causes of death when abuse had been involved. More research is needed into death records and true calculations to produce more insightful findings, especially in relation to the cumulative national context of youth incarceration.

It should also be noted that while the work of the Forgotten Children Initiative is primarily focused on uncovering the stories of incarcerated children who died, mortality data alone is insufficient to paint a complete picture of their experiences while incarcerated. The physical and psychological trauma children face while incarcerated can affect survivors for a lifetime, with consequences ranging from chronic pain and disability to increased recidivism rates.[22] As such, this map simply seeks to fill a gap in the research by compiling all available burial data on a national scale.

It is also important to note that many of the children sent to these facilities were not incarcerated for what today would be called delinquent acts. Rather, they were often locked up for being "incorrigible," for vagrancy, for being a "minor without proper care," or simply for being poor, orphaned, abused or unwanted. In modern times, they would almost certainly have been placed in the child welfare system. Instead, they were incarcerated, subjected to harsh discipline, forced labor, neglect and violence. Essentially, these children were the original "crossover youth", the term used currently for youth caught at the intersection of neglect and punishment, child welfare and juvenile justice, care and control.

[22] Justice Policy Institute. (2014, December). Sticker Shock: Calculating the full price tag of youth incarceration. https://justicepolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/sticker_shock_final_v2.pdf

[23] Schindler, M. & Stewart, M. (2026, July 6). Many of the Country's First Crossover Youth are Buried in Forgotten Graves. The Imprint. https://imprintnews.org/opinion/many-of-americas-first-crossover-youth-are-buried-in-forgotten-graves/275661

# Demographic Breakdowns

Comparisons across demographic subcategories are difficult, particularly due to the fact that institutional records are often incomplete, poorly organized and difficult to access and the various different time periods covered depending on how long institutions were open. As such, we cannot accurately present a complete picture of nationwide differences in treatment of children based on race and/or gender. Even so, these differences are important to understand the conditions that led to these children's deaths, and so we summarize what qualitative data we have uncovered below.

Of the known schools with gravesites identified and included on the map, 20 housed boys, 12 housed girls, and 8 housed a mix of genders. In nearly all states, boys and girls were separated, both due to the differences in their prescribed rehabilitation programs as well as a perceived obligation to prevent "mischief" on behalf of the incarcerated children. In cases where reform schools were gendered from the start, girls' institutions were often established years, if not decades, after the establishment of a boys' institution. In other cases, facilities that were originally co-educational were later split into two separate institutions, and girls were usually forced to move out, leaving them with no or diminished support while a new facility was constructed for them. Across the board, girls' institutions typically had less funding than boys' institutions,[24] leading to undercapacity, delays in vital building repairs, more limited access to medical technology, and other comparative shortcomings, all of which likely contributed to student mortality.

Boys faced different dangers. While children were typically expected to perform labor as part of their sentence, the specific work required of them was nearly always gendered—girls learned sewing, horticulture, and laundering clothes, while boys worked in barns, quarries, and garages. The logic of this distinction was to prepare children for the type of career that would be available to them upon release, but it inadvertently led to direct consequences for the children's mortality.[25] Further research is necessary to determine the exact extent of gender disparities in all aspects of youth prisons and their effect on outcomes for incarcerated children.

Institutional conditions also differ by race. While most of the institutions on our map were racially integrated, our findings include six institutions for Black children, and another six institutions that admitted all children but were internally segregated. As of this publication, we have not found records of children buried at prisons exclusively for White children (that were not integrated either before or after deaths took place), though this should not be taken as evidence of their absence. The earliest reform schools were typically integrated, simply because the institutions did not have the means to create separate spaces for the two groups. However, as youth prisons became the standard practice, segregated facilities became prominent in the South, where public institutions in most states were required to be racially segregated by law.[26] As in the case of gender, youth prisons for non-White children were often established decades after the creation of youth prisons for White children.

[24] Whitmore, M. (n.d.). State Industrial School for Girls. In Colorado Encyclopedia. https://coloradoencyclopedia.org/article/state-industrial-school-girls

[25] Thompson, M. (2013). Deaths at Indiana Boys' School, Plainfield, Indiana (1869-1932). https://www.plainfieldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Deaths-at-Indiana-Boys-School-1869-1932.pdf

[26] Jim Crow laws. (2026, March 17). HISTORY. https://www.history.com/articles/jim-crow-laws

Their labor was different, too. Much of the work Black children were required to perform was agricultural—a direct continuation of the work formerly performed by enslaved persons.[27] We have chosen to include the "Segregated" category for relevant institutions because prison segregation directly contributed to mortality. Living conditions for Black children in segregated prisons were substantially more hazardous, dilapidated, and overcrowded.[28] They faced harsher punishment than their White peers, racism and degradation on the part of staff members, and higher levels of neglect.[29] These injustices arose from a deeply unequal and prejudiced societal context, and are a key factor in explaining the origin of racial inequalities that persist in youth justice today.

Disparities due to race and gender did not operate independently. During our research, the hardest records to come by were those from schools created for Black girls—usually established after both schools for White girls and schools for Black boys (which already had delayed openings).[30] These schools had the least funding, the least staff, and the least capacity to care for incarcerated children,[31] leaving thousands of girls without sufficient services. Intersectionality is important to understanding the American juvenile legal system historically, and remains important today. Black and Indigenous children are grossly overrepresented among currently incarcerated youth.[32] Children are also at higher risk of being arrested for a crime if a parent has been incarcerated, if they live in a single-parent household, if they witness or experience familial violence,[33] and if they live in a neighborhood with high unemployment or drug presence.[34] Effective policy responses must recognize the complexity of the overlapping factors that lead to youth incarceration and work to address them in a just and equitable manner.

[27] Georgia Historical Society. (2026). Georgia's State Prison Farm (1899-1937). https://www.georgiahistory.com/ghmi_marker_updated/georgias-state-prison-farm-1899-1937/

[28] Kimmerle, E. H., Estabrook, R. W., Wells, E. C., Jackson, A. T. (2012). Documentation of the Boot Hill Cemetery (8JA1860) at the former Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys: Interim report, 2012. University of South Florida. https://cloud.usf.edu/usf-news-archive/article/articlefiles/5042-boot-hill-cemetery-interim-report-12-12.pdf

[29] Bush, B. (2021, October 25). For more than a century, Texas youth prisons have fostered abuse. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/10/25/more-than-century-texas-youth-prisons-have-fostered-abuse/

[30] Young, V. D. (1994). Race and gender in the establishment of juvenile institutions: The case of the South. The Prison Journal, 74(2), 244-265. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032855594074002006

[31] Balda, J. (2024, March 10). Rediscovered Histories: Quala Webster and African American Reform Schools in Virginia. Daily News-Register. https://www.dnronline.com/lifestyle_and_entertainment/rediscovered-histories-quala-webster-and-african-american-reform-schools-in-virginia/article_3a967609-ec5a-5714-acf4-647d589ce707.html

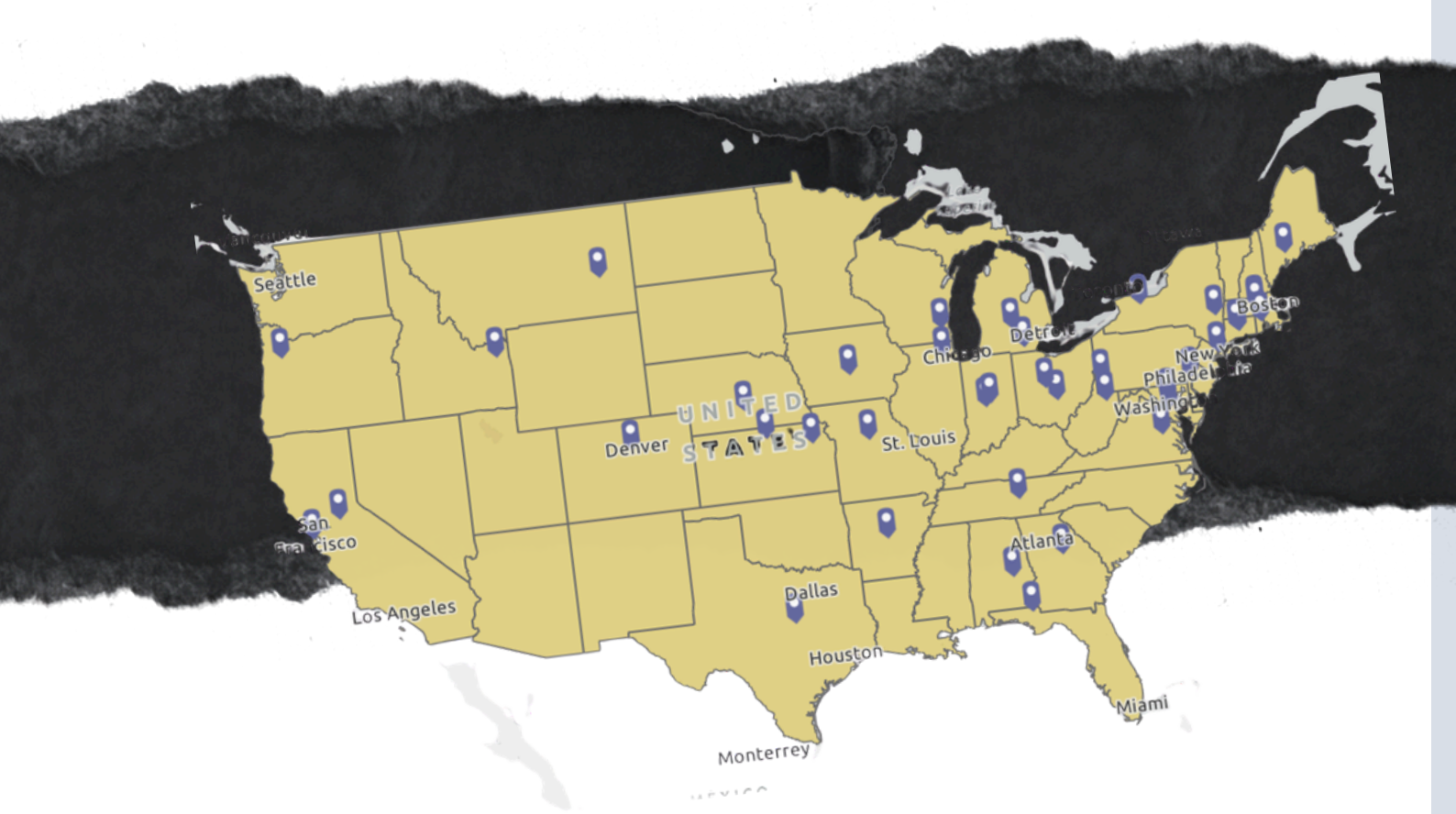
[32] Nam-Sonenstein, B., & Sawyer, W. (2025, August 25). Youth confinement: The whole pie 2025.

[33] Talaugon, A. R., & Turanovic, J. J. (2025). Childhood exposure to family violence, residential instability, and parental incarceration: Compounding household adversities and adolescent delinquency. Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 62(3), 387-428. https://doi.org/10.1177/00224278241280903

[34] Gunuboh, T. M. (2023). Parental poverty and neighborhood conditions as predictors of juvenile crime rates. Open Journal of Social Sciences, 11(7), 287-318. https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2023.117021

# National Map of Burial Sites

The Forgotten Children Initiative's national map of burial sites was built using ArcGIS and can be accessed at the link below:




**National Map of Burial Sites**

# Continuining Investigation

These findings are not complete and the investigation is continuing. We plan to update this map periodically as new information comes to light.

If you have any information regarding a potential burial site, particularly at any the institutions listed below, please contact us at **centerforyouthjustice@georgetown.edu**

## Sites of Interest

- Colorado State Industrial School for Girls - Colorado=
- Iowa Industrial School for Boys/State Training School at Eldora - Iowa
- State Reform School for Boys - Massachusetts
- Minnesota State Training School - Minnesota
- St. Louis House of Refuge - Missouri
- Eastern Carolina Industrial Training School for Boys - North Carolina
- Samarcand Manor/State Home and Industrial School for Girls - North Carolina
- Stonewall Jackson Training School - North Carolina
- North Dakota State Reform School - North Dakota
- Sockanosset Boys Training School - Rhode Island
- Gainesville State School for Girls - Texas
- Virginia Industrial School for Colored Girls/Janie Porter Barrett Industrial School - Virginia
- Vermont Industrial School/Weeks School - Vermont

# Conclusion

When the Forgotten Children Initiative began, there was only confirmation of a small number of places where children who died in custody had been buried. We wanted to understand whether Maryland, Florida and New York were isolated stories or part of something larger. With research showing evidence of burial sites associated with youth institutions in more than half of the states in the country, we now know this is a national tragedy.

**Though the investigation and research is continuing, we already know that behind every location on this map are children whose lives deserve to be known and whose families have a right to know what happened to their long lost relatives.**

**It is also important to note that the Initiative uses the word forgotten with care.** Many have stated that the children were not forgotten by God or by their families. Many were loved and remembered by parents and relatives. In many cases, however, the failure of institutions to adequately document and communicate children's deaths appears to have severed those connections so completely that the children disappeared from their family's history as well. Families today are sometimes learning for the first time that a child was part of their family, was sent to an institution, died there, and was buried there. It does appear clear that these children were forgotten by the institutions that took them into custody, by the governments that buried them, and by the history that failed to tell their stories (at least until now).

It is also critical to understand that while children deemed “incorrigible” are no longer sent en masse to houses of refuge, **far too many children today — particularly children of color, children with disabilities, and children in foster care, almost all of whom are also poor — are still punished for the harm done to them.** Too many are removed from their homes, moved from placement to placement, school to school, facility to facility, until the system itself becomes the source of instability. Recognizing the children buried at the houses of refuge and reformation as the nation’s first crossover youth shows that the boundary between child welfare and juvenile justice has always been porous, and too often, it has functioned as a one-way door toward punishment or a lifelong connection to ill-equipped systems.

In Maryland, the research has shown that finding the children is only the beginning. **Through genealogical research, the Forgotten Children Initiative has identified living relatives of children buried at the House of Reformation and brought families back into connection with children who had often been lost from their family histories, and into connection with other families confronting the same tragedies and resulting grief**. Those families are helping determine how their loved ones should be remembered, honored and memorialized, and advocating to improve today’s system so that their lost children did not die in

vain.[35] The Initiative is recommending bringing that same family-centered approach to the children in burial sites identified through its national research.

**The Forgotten Children Initiative is making this research available through a new national map documenting the burial sites identified to date.** The map is intended as a starting point for further research and community engagement—not simply a catalog of burial grounds, but a tool for recovering the identities and stories of the children buried at these sites.

The Forgotten Children Initiative is calling on researchers, public officials, genealogists, historians, families and communities to help identify the children represented on the map, recover their stories, and locate other burial sites that have not yet been identified. The Initiative's research is part of an ongoing investigation to discover all forgotten children buried at sites associated with youth institutions across the nation.

The research also raises broader questions about America's history of youth confinement and the continuing legacy of those institutions. Many of the sites represented in the research emerged from systems that confined children, often under conditions that reflected the racial and social inequalities of their eras. **Understanding what happened to children who died in those institutions is essential to understanding the history—and continuing evolution—of youth justice in America.** This includes understanding, confronting and addressing the deep problems that continue to exist in our current youth justice systems, where a disproportionate number of children of color are too often confined in dangerous and abusive prison-like facilities that are very expensive to operate and result in poor public safety and youth development outcomes.

The Forgotten Children Initiative's goal is not simply to locate burial sites. It is to restore the identities and dignity of children whose lives were at risk of disappearing from history, reconnect them with their families and communities, ensure that they become part of the American story, and work to dramatically reform today's policies and practices impacting children in current child-serving systems.

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