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"This place is like a prison": Disciplining Inmates and Resisting Institutionalization at the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind, 1882–1903

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ABSTRACT
This article investigates the experiences of the pupils-cum-inmates who attended the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind (OIB) between 1882 and 1903. Using testimonies from a provincial investigation conducted in 1900, the article positions the OIB as having developed as an extension and specialization of Ontario's social welfare and carceral apparatus. It argues that the OIB possessed certain of the structural and organizational features of carceral institutions. During the principalship of Alfred Hutchinson Dymond, the OIB borrowed carceral ideologies and techniques from the British penal reform movement to discipline inmates. Economic pressures combined with the OIB's organizational functions isolated pupils from broader society, increasing the likelihood of their mistreatment. The writings of the adult pupil Walter A. Ratcliffe, a former schoolteacher and deaf-blind socialist, were prescient in advancing a structural critique of institutionalization. Many of his peers criticized the province of Ontario for associating blindness with criminality.

RÉSUMÉ
Cet article examine le vécu des élèves-pensionnaires ayant fréquenté l'Institut ontarien pour l'éducation des aveugles entre 1882 et 1903. À partir de témoignages recueillis lors d'une enquête provinciale menée en 1900, l'article présente l'institut comme un prolongement et une spécialisation du système de protection sociale et carcéral de l'Ontario. Il soutient que cette institution présentait certaines caractéristiques structurelles et organisationnelles propres aux institutions carcérales. Sous la direction d'Alfred Hutchinson Dymond, l'Institut ontarien pour l'éducation des aveugles a emprunté des idéologies et des techniques carcérales au mouvement de réforme pénale britannique pour discipliner les pensionnaires. Les pressions économiques, conjuguées aux fonctions organisationnelles de l'institut, ont isolé les élèves du reste de la société, augmentant ainsi le risque de mauvais traitements. Les écrits de Walter A. Ratcliffe, ancien instituteur et socialiste sourd-aveugle, devenu adulte, se sont révélés prémonitoires alors qu'ils proposaient une critique structurelle de l'institutionnalisation. Nombre de ses pairs ont critiqué la province de l'Ontario pour avoir associé la cécité à la criminalité.

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Laughter might have echoed through the smoke-filled courtyard as a crowd of children and adolescents smoked tobacco in May 1883. As they enjoyed a moment of respite, the young men spoke among themselves, savouring the products smuggled into the institution from Brantford. But their visit was short-lived. Alfred Hutchinson Dymond, principal of the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind (OIB), surveilled the rule breakers through a window. He arrived moments later to reprimand them, punishing each by issuing a "small temporary deprivation of privileges": revoking their access to the institution's grounds. That week, Alphonse Hurtubise, one of the boys involved in the incident, "broke bounds" and fled the institution. Hurtubise was captured, returned to the OIB, and "[placed] in solitary confinement." Locked in the sanitarium, he was fed a diet of "bread and water."[1]

Hurtubise escaped from the sanitarium that evening. He was caught sometime later by a teacher, who spotted him "in the yard glorying in his performances." The teacher manhandled the boy, slapping him and "box[ing]" his ears before dragging him to the basement. Hurtubise kicked and screamed "murder" while resisting the arrest. He remained imprisoned for several hours, languishing in a sparsely furnished cellar populated with a "few baskets of potatoes." Once Principal Dymond left the institution to attend to his duties, the other pupils used the opportunity to fight back against their caretakers. They entered the basement during teatime, "liberat[ing] the prisoner."

That night, Hurtubise slept in the sanitarium, the door allegedly unlocked. As punishment, Principal Dymond expelled three of the offenders. Their schoolmates, however, immediately revolted. "The whole wing was in a commotion," Principal Dymond later told Robert Christie, the inspector of asylums, prisons, and public charities. While the pupils barricaded their dormitories, a few partially-sighted youths—known among educators as the "purblind"—acted like scouts, directing their compatriots from afar. But while the protestors fought admirably, their uprising was eventually crushed. Principal Dymond battered them with a walking cane, securing the premises. The dormitories, one could imagine, were enveloped by disquieting silence.

Alphonse Hurtubise's story is valuable in revealing how the control of space and movement, coupled with the reclassification of everyday activities as "privileges," shaped the power dynamics of the OIB. Confrontations often erupted because pupils were unable to freely navigate and leave the institution, as evidenced by the "investigation movement" of the early 1880s, in which a group of pupils secured the firing of John Howard Hunter, the OIB's second principal, by alleging that, among other complaints, administrators beat children with an "iron rod" until they bled and ensured discipline by "threat of imprisonment."[2] The institution's punitive conditions were left relatively unaffected by the 1881 investigation, and its day-to-day operations continued much as before.

Only at the turn of the twentieth century would another group of inmates challenge the OIB and its leadership. Walter A. Ratcliffe, a former schoolteacher and deaf-blind socialist, attended the institution between October 1897 and January 1899. After befriending Alexander Dyce, a young boy in the tuning and music department, and Arthur W. Beall, an adult pupil, former schoolteacher, and Christian

missionary, Ratcliffe published a public criticism of the OIB, *An Appeal for the Blind*, in March 1900.[3] His pamphlet outlined the OIB's prison-like character, revealed patterns of incarceration and mistreatment, and detailed the institution's material conditions. The pamphlet, together with a petition submitted by Beall to the provincial secretary of Ontario, prompted a provincial investigation in November 1900. The investigation is historically significant, not least because its complainants were two recently blinded former schoolteachers with professional knowledge of the standards of Ontario's public schools. Their perspectives on institutionalization serve as a kind of litmus test for the treatment of the OIB's inmates, especially when compared with the experiences and beliefs of their peers. The investigators—John George Hodgins, James Mills, and Theodore F. Chamberlain—conducted a handful of interviews with administrators, teachers, and inmates. Whereas inmates corroborated Ratcliffe and Beall's assessments, administrators and teachers derided the views of blind people as inherently unreliable. Ratcliffe and Beall responded in January 1901 by co-authoring another pamphlet, *A Further Appeal for the Blind*, which accused Principal Dymond of supressing evidence and intimidating witnesses.

Disability historians in Canada have made large strides in deepening our understanding of how schools for the blind and deaf developed during the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Recent scholarship by Joanna Pearce and Sandy Barron has examined how schools in Nova Scotia, Ontario, Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan were established by regional movements to ensure educational rights for people with sensory impairments, complementing earlier work that documented the careers of the leading educationalists who established residential institutions in Canada and the United States.[4] Other contributions have interpreted the cultural productions and representations of blind people in North America and Europe.[5] Positioning schools for the blind and deaf within the broader movement for compulsory and universal education, these scholars—who tend to rely on administrative records like annual reports, governmental correspondence, and institutional newspapers—show how administrators, teachers, parents, pupils, and graduates secured improvements in fundraising, educational methods, public understanding, and the construction of the schools themselves.[6] Canadian scholarship has examined schools for the blind and deaf primarily as educational institutions, with a focus on institutional and curricular development. As a result, we have little empirical information about, on the one hand, the interconnections between schools for the blind and deaf and Canada's social welfare and carceral systems and, on the other, the interpersonal conflicts that erupted therein.

Drawing on disability theorists and the sociology of institutional violence, this article situates the OIB in relation to Ontario's economy as well as its social welfare and carceral apparatus, revealing its status as a "total institution," a term coined by Erving Goffman to describe a place organized through a vertical and bureaucratic model of authority in which a large number of residents are segregated from broader society and where home and work are combined.[7] In their examination of the legal testimonies of the survivors of Canadian residential institutions, sociologists Kate Rossiter and Jen Rinaldi identify four organizational factors that worsen the treatment of

inmates: the institution isolates inmates and caretakers from broader society; dehumanizes inmates as inherently untrustworthy; attempts to rehabilitate the immutable traits of inmates; and operates under an austerity paradigm. Put another way, when children are disconnected from their communities, constructed as biologically inferior, and deprived of resources, cycles of mistreatment are neither random nor incidental but structurally encouraged.[8]

This article uses the testimonies of Hodgins's 1900 investigation as well as Ratcliffe's pamphlets to examine the OIB's carceral dimensions. As I show, all four of the organizational factors identified by Rossiter and Rinaldi were present at the OIB during the late nineteenth century. For the purposes of this article, the terms "pupils" and "inmates," both of which were used by educational authorities and inspectors, will be used somewhat interchangeably, reflecting their mutable identities. First, I examine the origins of the OIB and the economic and organizational factors that isolated inmates from broader society. Second, I analyze the ideology and disciplinary regime of Principal Dymond, who dehumanized blind people by fusing the ideas of pioneering educationalist Samuel Gridley Howe with concepts from the British penal reform movement, introducing disciplinary techniques including surveillance, solitary confinement, and systemic austerity. Third, I outline the critique of institutionalization developed by Walter A. Ratcliffe, who argued that the OIB's institutional model perverted the aims of education by generating conflicts between administrators, teachers, and inmates. Finally, I summarize the testimonies of Hodgins's 1900 investigation to corroborate Ratcliffe's critique and sketch a few preliminary comparisons between the OIB's social organization and the disciplinary regimes of carceral institutions and public schools. These discussions suggest that surveillance, solitary confinement, and material deprivation were the structural outcomes of an institutional approach to education predicated upon the physical and moral rehabilitation of blind people. Given the punitive conditions of institutionalization, it makes sense that some inmates considered the OIB—with its rigid, autocratic organization and tendency to punish inmates for minor disciplinary infractions—akin to a prison. In particular, inmates criticized the province of Ontario for permitting the practice of solitary confinement and associating blindness with criminality.

The Carceral Origins of the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind

The transformation of social welfare in Victorian Ontario centred around the gradual transition from "outdoor" to "indoor" relief, with recipients of government assistance becoming increasingly segregated from broader society. As capitalism began transforming cities like Toronto and Hamilton into major manufacturing centres, recurring economic crises began pushing artisans and craftspeople into waged labour.[9] Inequality remained strikingly high, particularly in urban areas. Workers with impairments like blindness likely struggled to compete against their able-bodied peers. And what about the countryside? While rural Ontarians remained relatively insulated from waged labour, smallholding families would have nonetheless struggled to support their blind children during periods of economic hardship.[10]

Authorities responded to Ontario's shifting economic landscape by enacting anti-vagrancy legislation designed to criminalize impoverished people, particularly those deemed "destitute," "defective," and "dependent." Disabled labourers were marginalized by inaccessible workplaces, hastening work discipline, and uncaring employers. Ontario's jails functioned like congregate facilities.[11] With an economic crisis well underway, Ontario's jails became overcrowded with people classified as "imbeciles," "lunatics," and "idiots." Toronto's House of Industry, meanwhile, was warehousing elderly people, blind people, "cripples"[12]—Ontario's jails and institutions had become repositories for the dispossessed.

In 1868, Canadian educationalist Reverend Egerton Ryerson, having investigated similar institutions in Britain, France, and the United States, encouraged the province of Ontario to establish residential education for blind people. Institutionalization was designed to transform "helpless" and "burden[some]" charges into "independent" citizens. By rehabilitating the deaf and blind, conceptualized by Ryerson as distinct "classes of unfortunates," residential education would fulfill the lofty ideals of Canada's developing polity, or "civilized community."[13] According to educational authorities, the OIB would complement the province's burgeoning penal apparatus by reducing "public dependency." As John Howard Hunter, the institution's second principal, argued in 1876: "If the institution system is made thoroughly effective, the class of persons requiring … asylum relief [would] speedily disappear."[14] The desire to reduce public dependency coincided with the mission of John Woodburn Langmuir, Ontario's inspector of asylums, prisons, and public charities, to improve the regulation and classification of Ontario's social welfare and carceral institutions. Only by preventing the intermixing of "hardened criminal[s]" with juvenile offenders and vagrants, Langmuir argued, could the provincial government mitigate social disorder.[15]

The Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind—placed under the authority of Langmuir—was established in 1872. The government of Ontario categorized the OIB with similar facilities "exclusively controlled by the Provincial Government," including prisons, asylums, and reformatories. Between 1864 and 1881, correctional facilities proliferated across Ontario, roughly doubling from 49 to 107.[16] By 1881, Langmuir could assert that the province had erected "one of the most complete charitable and correctional systems on the continent," an extensive network of jails, prisons, asylums, hospitals, and reformatories.[17] In other words, the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind developed concurrently with Ontario's prisons. Both systems were essentially carceral.

While the OIB boasted of an extensive curriculum—encompassing ethnology, geography, philology, algebra, elocution, Bible study, mental philosophy, and Canadian, English, ancient, and natural history—pupils complained that teachers were either unable or unwilling to fulfill their duties. In practice, the OIB prioritized vocational training: boys learned chair, basket, broom, and hammock making as well as piano tuning; girls learned crocheting, sewing, and knitting; and both sexes acquired a rudimentary education in reading and writing. Most pupils, who lived in sex-segregated dormitories, were children and adolescents born in Ontario,

although some adults and out-of-province pupils attended. Inmates were typically institutionalized for seven to nine years, although many stayed longer, and vacations lasted between June and September. Since pupils' letters were censored and their money controlled, some requests to return home during vacation time could be and were denied.

It appears that economic pressures played a major role in the decisions of parents to send their children to the OIB. As Pearce has shown, parents often identified financial constraints as a primary antecedent to institutionalization when corresponding with the OIB's authorities.[18] Pupils could attend free of charge and receive food and shelter if their parents provided proof of indigency to their municipality. By 1881, oversight of these documents had effectively ceased and nobody attending the institution was a paying pupil.[19] In 1872, roughly 69 per cent of residents were orphans or indigent. That proportion rose during the economic crisis that began in 1873: from 92 per cent between 1873 and 1875, to 96 per cent in 1876, and 100 per cent in 1877.[20] These figures are significant because, on the one hand, they mirror the surge of overcrowding in the jails during the 1870s and, on the other, reflect the inverse in terms of the enrollment numbers of Ontario's public schools, where rural schoolmasters continued to struggle to maintain regular attendance.[21] Whereas able-bodied children were required by their parents to contribute to the family economy, institutionalization offered impoverished families a means of reducing caretaking costs for the parents of children who, according to educational authorities, were often "very poor."[22] These economic pressures would have constrained pupils' autonomy, making leaving the institution difficult and deepening their feelings of helplessness and isolation.

The Ideology of Alfred Hutchinson Dymond and the Public Institution as a Mechanism of Rehabilitation

Alfred Hutchinson Dymond, born in 1827, received a Quaker education in Croydon, England, before embarking on a business career. During his childhood, Dymond became acquainted with Peter Bedford, a London-based Quaker, merchant, and philanthropist associated with the Society for the Improvement of Prison Discipline (SIPD).[23] Comprised of philanthropists and industrialists, the SIPD, founded in 1816, campaigned to replace capital punishment with an effective and uniform penal apparatus, endorsing non-corporal punishments like solitary confinement, religious training, and punitive labour.[24] Dymond's beliefs regarding criminality, shaped by Bedford's SIPD, emerged as "almost a necessary consequence of [his] early associations."[25] Following his appointment as the secretary for the Society for the Abolition of Capital Punishment in 1854, Dymond dedicated his life to penal reform. From its inception, the mission of penal reform was somewhat contradictory. While some reformers were dedicated to improving the conditions in the jails, most sought to construct an effective and uniform penal apparatus, leaving them open to criticism for championing punishments in some ways comparatively more brutal than the regimes they replaced. The tension between the humanitarian

ambitions of penal reform and its consequences as an agonist of surveillance and confinement is the central irony explored by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*.[26] Dymond believed that, whereas executions aroused public sympathy for offenders, imprisonment would suppress criminality through rehabilitation, ensuring the "healthy operation of reformatory influences."[27] After emigrating to Toronto in 1869, he became a journalist for the Toronto *Globe*, pursued a career in politics, and was appointed to oversee the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind in 1881.[28]

Biomedical understandings of blindness, established decades earlier by American educationalist Samuel Gridley Howe, founder of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, allowed Dymond to rationalize the imprisonment of pupils. Canadian and American educationalists had expounded upon Howe's annual reports during the mid-to-late nineteenth century, borrowing elements of both hereditarian and environmental theories to classify blind people as physically, mentally, and emotionally defective.[29] Described by disability historian Sarah F. Rose as a "proto-eugenic[ist]"—a world view informed by religious and pre-Darwinian, Lamarckian ideas that framed blindness as the result of an individual's "constitutional weaknesses"—Howe posited that the heredity of blindness produced physical, intellectual, and emotional aberrations.[30] Dymond regarded Howe as an intellectual powerhouse: "The King of Educators of the Blind."[31] Although Howe and Dymond's views share certain affinities with modern eugenics, particularly in their embrace of biological determinism, they predated the American and British eugenics movements associated with Sir Francis Galton. Eugenics only came to play a role at the OIB during the early twentieth century.

During a professional conference in 1887, Dymond outlined a presumed relationship between blindness and immorality. "I suppose all idiosyncrasies arise from a cause," he remarked, "and a first cause is blindness." Fuelled by a self-professed "philanthropic" and "benevolent" spirit, Dymond likened blindness to a "disease," a physical defect that engendered "natural idiosyncrac[ies]" and immoral habits among those affected. He observed in 1888 that blind people possessed "inherent constitutional weakness[es]." He continued: "A large proportion of the blind are weak in the hands and arms, the fingers are limp and the wrists feeble."[32] He suggested that blindness produced an "awkward, groping gait," coupled with frequent and repetitive head movements. More serious offences included both intellectual and emotional aberrations. These physiological abnormalities, Dymond argued, were aggravated by two overlapping influences: parental mismanagement and public sympathy. Even simple comforts like food and shelter, he believed, promoted idleness among blind people.[33]

Importantly, Dymond's views on capital punishment and solitary confinement mirrored his fears about the harmful effects of public sympathy toward blind people. Whereas public executions aroused sympathy for criminals and thereby impeded their reformation, parental mismanagement and even public institutions guided by "too much benevolence," Dymond believed, undermined the industriousness of blind people by inducing a kind of learned helplessness. The public institution, from

Dymond's view, had to be carefully tailored, as educators dispensed physical, educational, and moral training to "succeed in treating" and "cur[ing]" the idiosyncrasies induced by blindness.[34] Punishments would rehabilitate inmates into moral, industrious workers. Indeed, Dymond demarcated blind people as natural members of the working class. "We have to remember who it is we are teaching," he remarked. "First, [by] the scope of their ideas, and second, by the limited character of their necessities. We are not educating the blind to be railroad managers, great merchants or business men."[35]

Following his appointment in 1881, Dymond operationalized his theories, reducing expenditures on provisions while expanding the salaries of administrators, teachers, and servants. Educators prevented pupils from becoming "too comfortable," parroting an ascetic slogan: "He that will not work neither shall he eat."[36] By imposing an austerity regime, the institution attempted to reduce "public dependency" and discipline a workforce. From 1882–86 to 1889–1903, Dymond restructured the OIB: wages and salaries rose from 45.31 per cent to 53.61 per cent of the budget, while food and provisions dropped from 22.48 per cent to 15.41 per cent.[37] Dymond's policies, not unlike the SIPD's preoccupation with non-corporal punishments, framed material deprivation as reformatory—a pathway to redemption.

The OIB's private, closed system of rehabilitation, which required the strict control of inmates' behaviour, was regulated through a disciplinary regime of surveillance and solitary confinement. As one administrator recounted, pupils were "spied upon or treated as suspected criminals," an arrangement referred to as the "spy-system."[38] Educationalists were preoccupied, above all, with regulating expressions of both platonic and sexual affection. Alexander Dyce explained that teachers reported disciplinary infractions to Principal Dymond, especially for offenses like masturbation and smoking.[39] Pupils were subjected to "system[s] of espionage," as supervisors "slip[ped] around in the dark," catching rulebreakers and transgressors.[40] Literary instructor Walter Wickens, hoping to prevent future mutinies, had proposed the technique of solitary confinement to Inspector Langmuir during the investigation of 1881. Wickens argued that solitary confinement would "reform" and "humanize" dissidents. He remarked that blind people were naturally oversensitive: "I think a boy who is mutinous & inciting others should … be expelled. Suspension from classes would not have that effect, solitary confinement might."[41] Solitary confinement dismantled solidarities among inmates and functioned as a religious practice meant to rehabilitate dissenters. According to Pearce, institutional pedagogy prioritized religious training because educationalists regarded blind people as incapable of experiencing God's nurturing light.[42] Figures like trades instructor Thomas Truss championed the "divine doctrine of forgiveness," leveraging Christian piety to rationalize the imprisonment of pupils. "If you are inclined to show the least penitence, we have a penitent bench in the reflection chamber," he remarked, "and we will be inclined to make the terms of reparation as easy as possible."[43] Truss asserted that Christianity would comingle with solitude, familiarizing inmates with industriousness. His outlook, influenced by both Quakerism and monastic discipline, was broadly shared among penal reformers.[44]

Walter A. Ratcliffe's Critique of Institutionalization

It was from Dymond's disciplinary regime that Walter A. Ratcliffe, in collaboration with Arthur W. Beall and a coterie of pupils, formed his criticism of the OIB. Ratcliffe's pamphlet, *An Appeal for the Blind*, published in March 1900, condemned the imprisonment and mistreatment of working-class inmates. *An Appeal* was, in theory and in practice, a socialist critique of institutionalization. In analyzing how the organization and financial mismanagement of the OIB laid the groundwork for the mistreatment of inmates, Ratcliffe's insights were prescient in viewing blindness not merely as an immutable physical ailment, but as a relational condition shaped by economic, social, and cultural factors. He argued that Principal Dymond's autocratic mode of leadership had generated inequalities in power and resources between administrators, teachers, and inmates, leading to the construction of a prison-like educational environment that divided residents into antagonistic classes or castes reminiscent of the guard-prisoner relationship.

One of the most consequential arguments in Ratcliffe's *Appeal* concerned the OIB's lack of "home influence," the absence of which, he believed, failed to fulfill the purpose of parental socialization: "The Institution building does not furnish conditions that are conducive to the comfort, health or good moral growth of the unfortunates who are literally dragged there." Due to their isolation from Canadian society, Ratcliffe argued, pupils were unfamiliar with broader social norms, and graduates faced challenges in acclimating to the outside world. "In [the OIB]," Ratcliffe explained, the pupils "form habits that they will be sure to practice when they leave it." He pointed to the pupils' lack of table manners and the inability of boys and girls to socialize among themselves, owing to their segregation by sex and the near-total absence of furniture and communal play and study spaces. The classification of the OIB with asylums and prisons further undermined its "proper standing" as an educational institution, Ratcliffe argued; it was "too often called the Blind Asylum." Associations between blindness and criminality travelled outside the OIB proper.[45]

Material inequalities that aggravated blindness as a disability were, Ratcliffe suggested, a fundamental aspect of life at the OIB. Whereas inmates languished in overcrowded, bedbug-infested hovels, the principal resided in a "palatial residence." Ratcliffe derided some of the OIB's administrators and teachers, who availed themselves of perquisites, including "free lodgings, free board, free laundry, stationary, ten stamps a month and streetcar tickets … free fuel, free light, milk, vegetables, [and] one domestic." As Ratcliffe wryly observed, the teachers grew "gouty on chocolate pudding and roast turkey," while the pupils were given "ancient beef and dried apple-pie," accompanied by flavourless coffee and tea. Rather than benefit working-class inmates, institutionalization funnelled resources upwards, reaffirming the authority of teachers and administrators.[46]

Beyond material deprivation, Ratcliffe criticized the corrosive nature of institutional authority. According to Ratcliffe's *Appeal*, the very manner in which pupils and teachers were housed—that is, through the residential or dormitory system—contributed to the spread of apathy among caretakers. Ratcliffe argued that institutional

life prompted moral abdication by constructing a private moral economy separate from the social norms of the outside world: "The world in which the blind live is necessarily very narrow. By living close to the same spot month after month, year after year the teachers become much like the pupils, and the new pupils become like them ... [first] indifferent and then apathetic." He believed that one of the best examples of teachers' indifference was the OIB's workshop, which served the purpose of punishment rather than education: "the [most] dire punishment of all is to be sent to the willow-shop."[47]

An Appeal suggested that, in emphasizing surveillance and confinement over pedagogy, the OIB's preoccupation with ensuring discipline compelled teachers to act as the "pupils turn-keys" rather than their "friends." The OIB's unique social organization allowed pupils to be "treated as inferior beings … not as people who have rights." From Ratcliffe's view, solitary confinement was an injustice perpetrated by teachers primarily interested in maintaining their authority. "This room," which sported boarded-up windows to prevent escapes, "consists of two small cells with a wooden bench across each," reported Ratcliffe's *Appeal*. "In one of these cells is a steam-pipe but no window, in the other is a window but no steam-pipe." Indeed, according to Ratcliffe, the OIB resembled, to many of its inmates, a carceral institution: "This expensive establishment is a combination of a poor-house and prison."[48]

Ratcliffe's critique revealed how the OIB's vertical and bureaucratic model of authority generated an unstable social environment where interpersonal violence was endemic. "Anarchy is the natural fruit of oppression," Ratcliffe declared. "Groans are not hurled back at the head of a tender father, but at the fool ruler." He argued that confrontations between inmates and the institution's teachers and administrators were a predictable outcome of an institutional system based on surveillance and confinement. The OIB's administrators, *An Appeal* alleged, had "mutiny after mutiny on [their] hands." Pupils subjected to indignities were frightened into "falsehood and deceit" and made to "develop cunning that is painful to see in young children." As Ratcliffe contended, these conditions had culminated in at least one instance where "half a hundred of his pupils [were] up in arms at once."[49]

For Ratcliffe, the institutional model cultivated a perverse social environment that corrupted the purposes of education and replaced them with conditions more akin to a "prison" or the "Mercer Reformatory" in Toronto.[50] Substantive improvements, *An Appeal* concluded, required both economic and administrative reforms. The redistribution of expenditures would improve the well-being of graduates by funding better food and lodgings. By appointing a board of trustees and integrating the institution into the Department of Education, authorities could de-institutionalize the OIB, at least in part, ensuring a more supportive environment and establishing a curriculum aligned with Ontario's public schools. Whatever the particularities of Ratcliffe's recommendations, his understanding of education as a vehicle for personal development represented the inverse of Principal Dymond's carceral approach. At stake in Ratcliffe's critique was the very nature of the OIB itself and, more broadly, the moral legitimacy of institutionalization in Ontario.

The Effects of Institutionalization on the Lives of Inmates

Walter A. Ratcliffe's critique, which analyzed how the OIB's hierarchical authority and financial mismanagement aggravated the condition of blindness and enabled the mistreatment of inmates, was prescient in anticipating many of the key arguments used by contemporary theorists of institutional violence, especially Goffman and Foucault. As Rossiter and Rinaldi explain, the violence that erupts within total institutions arises from their very structure and organization, namely the four organizational factors of isolation, dehumanization, rehabilitation, and austerity.[51] Its occurrence is situational — that is, it emerges through a process of moral abdication, wherein accepted social norms are gradually eroded in favour of advancing institutional aims, which allows caretakers to recast violence as care and punishment as rehabilitation. The OIB displayed all four of these organizational factors.

Ratcliffe's criticisms about the OIB's lack of "home-like influence" echo what Goffman called "disculturation," a process of untraining that strips inmates of the basic skills necessary to live independently beyond the institution.[52] In parsing accounts of how inmates understood themselves, one is reminded of Foucault's notion of subjectification: subjects' identities are produced not only by their own conduct but also the values and beliefs ascribed to them by institutional authority.[53] Hodgins' 1900 investigation confirmed that some inmates experienced both disculturation and subjectification. One graduate complained that inmates were treated not as humans or workers but as "slaves, or inferiors." Supervisors had disciplined George W. Coppin, an adolescent, for placing "[his] arm on another boy's shoulder," which instilled "the impression that there was something wrong in the act." Upon graduating in 1899, Coppin, who described himself as "moral[ly] cramped," struggled to reintegrate into Canadian society. The eighteen-year-old worker became awkward and flustered when conversing with able-bodied people, especially women. The treatment Coppin endured caused him to recognize himself as essentially subhuman. "When I left the institution I had the impression that most men were brutes," he explained. "The idea conveyed to my mind that I was a brute."[54]

As Ratcliffe's critique highlighted, the classification of the OIB with prisons and asylums further delegitimized its educational mission. Evidence from Hodgins' 1900 investigation suggests that the OIB's association with criminality contributed to the stigmatization of its graduates. Inmates tended to lambast the province of Ontario for "class[ifying] [blind people] with lunatics and criminals." Ratcliffe criticized the "cruelty" and "degradation" of the practice of solitary confinement, while Alexander Dyce remembered feeling "ashamed" and "humiliate[ed]" for attending an institution that families in Brantford called "the Asylum."[55] As the former schoolteacher Arthur W. Beall remarked, the pupils who attended the OIB were "doubly handicapped," constrained not only by their impairments but also by their association with criminality.[56]

Ratcliffe's *Appeal for the Blind* exposed how the OIB reproduced inequalities between administrators, teachers, and inmates, identifying material deprivation as a central feature of institutional life. According to Rossiter and Rinaldi, austerity reinforces the need for a vertical and bureaucratic model of authority, since meagre food

and resources must be rationed among a large number of inmates, both contributing to and signaling their devaluation as citizens.[57] The process referred to by Goffman as the "mortification of the self" begins upon entry into the institution, when the onboarding of inmates commences the gradual stripping away of their autonomy and identities.[58] The OIB's supervisors were empowered to control minute details of the inmates' lives, including their money and personal belongings as well as their access to food. During Hodgins's 1900 investigation, the adult pupil James Stuart remembered arriving at the institution, at which point the nurse inspected his suitcase and derided its contents, leading to a feeling of "annoyance without redress."[59] Twenty-four-year-old George B. Welz reported feeling rushed and ill-treated, "like a lion would treat a lamb." One day, when Welz arrived for mealtime, the supervisor grabbed his collar and, shaking him, prevented him from eating breakfast. Meanwhile, pupils' meals were served cold, and their beverages, brewed in unwashed soup pots, tasted like "onions" and "dishwater."[60] Some evidence suggests that material deprivation translated into malnutrition. Several pupils, educators reported, were sluggish and feeble, proving incapable of holding their utensils.[61]

Ratcliffe's *Appeal for the Blind* identified the OIB's residential or dormitory system as responsible for exacerbating the mistreatment of inmates, since institutionalization furnished a narrow, private society that demoralized teachers and inmates alike. As Rossiter and Rinaldi explain, the social and physical isolation of inmates and caretakers is partly determinant in shaping the occurrence of institutional violence.[62] The OIB's only inspectors were those responsible for monitoring prisons and asylums, and educators could present a closely manicured version of institutional life, reducing the likelihood of outside interventions. Disciplinary techniques like surveillance and solitary confinement were deployed to regulate "whole blocks of people," a common feature of total institutions, to erode solidarities among inmates. Children recalled being confined to "the school's prison," also known as the "cooler," for relatively innocuous behaviour.[63] Neither cell was well ventilated; the chambers were either blazingly hot or too cold. Prisoners languished over wooden benches overnight, relieving themselves without a toilet or sink. "[I] don't consider them fit to put anyone in," George W. Coppin, a graduate, remarked. Alexander Dyce, who attended the institution for twelve years, recalled being imprisoned eight times during one session.[64] One pupil named Rixon Rafter was imprisoned for roughly forty-eight hours and fed a diet of bread and water after placing a pair of boots on his bed.[65]

The OIB's emphasis on security and behavioural modification, which Ratcliffe identified in his *Appeal*, also distorted the aims of education, as manual training became a form of punishment. Having attended the institution from 1894 to 1897, Walter B. Donkin, a basket maker, contended that the workshop had entered a "comatose state." According to Donkin, the trades instructor absented himself from classes, while pupils lacked equipment and tools—"not a complete set in the whole shop."[66] The workshop was an effective punishment because inmates were coerced to labour in a musty, windowless basement for hours on end. The work itself was low-paying; upon leaving the institution, graduates were trapped within a moribund profession, forced to compete as artisans during an era of burgeoning mass production.

As one graduate concluded, "pupils were given manual labor as a punishment, or as a means of filling up their time." Twenty-seven-year-old Edward Robinson attended the institution beginning in 1898. Robinson was "partially compelled" into the workshop, which became "a place for punishment instead of education." Ratcliffe suggested that administrators had "degrade[d] labour" by emphasizing the punitive functions of industrial training. Ratcliffe concluded: "There is not an intelligent workman … not slurred by the other boys as … a shop boy."[67]

Ratcliffe's *Appeal* criticized the OIB for reproducing certain features of the guard-prisoner relationship, described by Goffman as the "staff-inmate split."[68] As Goffman asserted, institutionalization generates antagonistic relationships among caretakers and inmates because, whereas the former act as representative of the institution, the latter are primarily concerned with survival and self-preservation, leading to the construction of two distinct social and cultural worlds. As evidenced by the "investigation movement" of 1881 and Alphonse Hurtubise's jailbreak of 1883, the OIB's surveillance regime compelled inmates into disobedience and deceit, which Hodgins' 1900 investigation confirmed. Adolescents and children engaged in subversive activities, pooling their money before travelling into Brantford to purchase contraband like tobacco and whisky.[69] Rebellious inmates destroyed radiators, executed jailbreaks, flooded washrooms, plundered supplies, and shattered windows.[70] When their grievances were either dismissed or ignored, pupils organized large-scale mutinies. One day, after somebody named Murray was imprisoned, his friends rallied together to demand his "liberat[tion]." That night, Murray's acquittal stimulated an uproar; protestors clapped and screamed, whooped and hollered.[71]

Ratcliffe was critical of the indignities suffered by inmates. Their adverse treatment can be understood by referring to Rossiter and Rinaldi, who explain that the social divisions engendered by total institutions permit caretakers to reconfigure punishment as a mundane feature of institutional life, justified through the rhetoric of security.[72] In the case of the OIB, children were waterboarded by the trades instructor, who "[held] the offender[s] under the hydrant while [their] mouth[s] w[ere] explored and purified."[73] Supervisors admitted to wielding "part of a buggy whip," an implement designed to drive horses. Caretakers were known to incapacitate inmates before pulling their trousers down and having them beaten and whipped. The mother of eight-year-old Howard Myers contacted the authorities in January 1903 after discovering painful markings littered across her son's body. After accidentally breaking a window, Myers was

> stripped, put over the "horse" in the gymnasium, and given five lashes by the Principal.… Mr. Hossie held his head, and Mr. Roney his feet. His mother says that he bore the marks of this flogging after his return home.… He was locked in a cell all night, having nothing to eat but bread and water and with only a bench to sleep on.[74]

Demonstrations of brutality were, therefore, routine and normalized. The control of pupils' movement and communication, together with their subjection to disciplinary

techniques like solitary confinement and material deprivation, caused some to regard the institution as inherently prison-like. "I think in this particular and in reading letters," Alexander Dyce remarked, "this place is like a prison."[75]

In recounting these stories, my intention is not to suggest that Ontario's public schools were always gentle — they were often sites of brutal violence — but rather to demonstrate how the OIB's unique social organization likely contributed to the mistreatment of inmates. The OIB was organizationally different from Ontario's public schools, owing to its status as a total institution. It was, in turn, differentiated from Indian residential schools, known during the late nineteenth century simply as boarding or industrial schools, by the frequency and severity of violence, the degree of underfunding, and their respective roles within the economy and state. While similar punishments and issues of malnutrition existed at both the OIB and Indian residential schools, deaths were more common at the latter, and they received fewer resources. Both institutions operated under the auspices of benevolence. However, whereas the OIB served the purpose of rehabilitation, combining the directives of education and incarceration to refashion individuals considered defective according to a normative vision of the moral, industrious citizen, Indian residential schools fulfilled settler colonialism's logic of elimination, embodying a racist, genocidal project geared toward the gradual destruction of Indigenous identities.

The control of space and movement, together with the reduction of everyday activities to the status of "privileges," were defining features of the institutional experience. In public schools, pupils were motivated by competition for rewards. At the OIB, inmates were punished through the deprival of privileges, particularly their access to the outside world.[76] The "privilege system," according to Goffman, is a core mechanism of total institutions, relying on depriving inmates of ordinary, human comforts to ensure conformity with rules and regulations.[77] Inmates' lack of autonomy over their movement and communication explains why some complained that "a pupil ha[s] no freedom — no rights — all privilege[s]."[78] Unlike the OIB, public schools were regulated by the education office, the board of trustees, and the moral standards of the community; if a sighted pupil were mistreated at a public school, they could return home and inform their parents. Concerned family members could either intervene directly in the classroom or appeal to the magistracy to have teachers fined or charged with assault.[79] As Ratcliffe explained, "the public school teacher who dared to lock a child [in a jail cell] would soon find himself out of employment."[80] The OIB's administrators and teachers administered punishments, without repercussion, comparatively crueler than what was considered socially acceptable at public schools. Principal Dymond was himself aware of the negative connotations associated with solitary confinement, because he summarily denied its use when corresponding with the provincial inspector despite advertising the OIB's "reflection room" in official publications.[81] While the evidence is admittedly fragmentary, one common punishment would have seen pupils at public schools receive "between four and eight straps on the open palm," and Susan E. Houston and Alison Prentice suggest that most mid-nineteenth-century communities believed that "making a [visible] mark [on pupils' bodies]" constituted an excessive punishment.[82] Moreover, most citizens

would have regarded solitary confinement, whippings with implements like iron rods and buggy whips, and bread and water diets—if applied to a sighted child—as entirely unwarranted, but they were common practices at industrial schools, reformatories, prisons, penitentiaries, and Indian residential schools.[83] Surveillance, solitary confinement, and material deprivation were the structural outcomes of the logic of rehabilitation.

Conclusion

While the OIB's inmates had succeeded in calling attention to the institution's lacklustre conditions, it was clear that the investigators thought relatively little of the opinions of blind people. The province proved hostile to structural reforms. Following the investigation, administrators and teachers downplayed the grievances of inmates by portraying the OIB's disciplinary procedures as permissive compared to American and Canadian standards. On the one hand, the investigators awarded piecemeal reforms, recommending, for example, that educators re-emphasize literary pursuits like spelling.[84] Likewise, the province of Ontario transferred the OIB from the inspector of asylums, prisons, and public charities to the Department of Education. On the other hand, authorities refused to dismiss Principal Dymond, who continued to oversee the institution before succumbing to illness in 1903. The provincial government ultimately ignored Ratcliffe's proposals to de-institutionalize the OIB. By refusing to condemn patterns of incarceration and mistreatment, provincial authorities tacitly reaffirmed the institution's punitive character. It remained, as Ratcliffe concluded in his *Further Appeal for the Blind*, "a moral quagmire, a destroyer rather than a developer," an educational environment that hampered the advancement and well-being of blind Canadians.[85]

This article, drawing on theories of institutional violence, has charted the development of the OIB and disclosed its operations between 1881 and 1903. It has situated the OIB as an extension and specialization of Ontario's carceral apparatus, demonstrating how administrators borrowed carceral ideologies and techniques from the British penal reform movement to discipline inmates. In drawing from theoreticians of institutional violence, I have argued that the disciplinary techniques of surveillance, solitary confinement, and material deprivation were the structural outcomes of an institutional model committed to the physical and moral rehabilitation of blind people. All four of the organizational factors identified by Rossiter and Rinaldi—isolation, dehumanization, rehabilitation, and underfunding—were present at the OIB. The emerging industrial capitalist economy had left many blind people destitute, and the OIB's administrators were free to censor pupils' correspondence, isolating them from broader society. Principal Dymond had, in the name of benevolent philanthropy, promulgated an understanding of blindness that dehumanized blind people as physically debilitated and morally suspect. His disciplinary regime sought to rehabilitate inmates using systemic austerity. The loss of autonomy experienced by most pupils made the OIB feel less like a public school and more like an industrial school or reformatory. These findings point to the permeability of

educational and carceral discourses in general and the historical association between disability and imprisonment in particular.

The primary sources used in this article — testimonies gathered during Hodgins' 1900 investigation — have helped illuminate some of the disciplinary techniques and informal methods of resistance in operation at the OIB as a total institution. These practices are not easily revealed by examining turgid annual reports and government correspondence, pointing to the necessity of using testimonies and oral history to reconstruct the experiences of inmates. In providing an empirical case study of the development and operation of the OIB as a social welfare and carceral institution, this article has applied foundational concepts in British disability studies, which first clarified the historical relationship between incarceration and disability during the 1990s.[86] I have explored the myriad ways in which the project of benevolence combined the aims of education and incarceration, reproducing elements of the guard-prisoner relationship. The OIB was, in its organization, distinct from Ontario's public schools. Complaints about the OIB's prison-like character extended from the 1880s well into the late twentieth century, a testament to the long-lasting effects of its development under the inspector of asylums, prisons, and public charities.[87] Beyond the issue of historiography, the study of disability and incarceration is important because residential schools for blind and deaf people are still open today. Families continue to have limited options in choosing where to educate their blind and deaf children. Perhaps a humble first step in improving the educational opportunities of blind and deaf people lies in elucidating the historical legacies of residential schools as carceral institutions.

Notes

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