Religion, Science, and Child Welfare in a Kentucky Archive

Elizabeth Saldaña
Doctoral candidate in Anthropology
Funded by CHW under the U.S. Health Policy Scholars Program

Background
- Preliminary fieldwork at a child welfare agency in Kentucky in 2017, noticed religious legacies incorporated into the institutional culture of the agency.
- By 2018, Former Governor Matt Bevin had appointed two Special Advisers, both affiliated with the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary with minimal prior experience in child welfare systems.

Objective of the Study
I wanted to know about the relationships between religious organizations, child caring institutions, and state institutions in the commonwealth.

Methods
- Exploring historical origins of child welfare agencies in Kentucky
- Looking specifically for religious support in funding and operations
- Conducted archival research at the Filson Historical Society in Louisville in 2018

Findings

Findings on Religious Institutions
- Surveys and formal reports suggested that many child caring institutions had funding and operational support from religious organizations.
- Religious organizations played a wide variety of roles:
  - conducting investigations
  - child placement
  - fundraising
  - direct care
- Many of the agencies still exist, some with their original names (i.e. Home of the Innocents).
- Ingram played an important role in establishing Kentucky’s child welfare systems.

Findings on Religious Institutions
- Surveys and formal reports suggested that many child caring institutions had funding and operational support from religious organizations.
- Religious organizations played a wide variety of roles:
  - conducting investigations
  - child placement
  - fundraising
  - direct care
- Many of the agencies still exist, some with their original names (i.e. Home of the Innocents).
- Ingram played an important role in establishing Kentucky’s child welfare systems.

Findings on Religious Institutions
- Surveys and formal reports suggested that many child caring institutions had funding and operational support from religious organizations.
- Religious organizations played a wide variety of roles:
  - conducting investigations
  - child placement
  - fundraising
  - direct care
- Many of the agencies still exist, some with their original names (i.e. Home of the Innocents).
- Ingram played an important role in establishing Kentucky’s child welfare systems.

Findings on Religious Institutions
- Surveys and formal reports suggested that many child caring institutions had funding and operational support from religious organizations.
- Religious organizations played a wide variety of roles:
  - conducting investigations
  - child placement
  - fundraising
  - direct care
- Many of the agencies still exist, some with their original names (i.e. Home of the Innocents).
- Ingram played an important role in establishing Kentucky’s child welfare systems.

Findings on Religious Institutions
- Surveys and formal reports suggested that many child caring institutions had funding and operational support from religious organizations.
- Religious organizations played a wide variety of roles:
  - conducting investigations
  - child placement
  - fundraising
  - direct care
- Many of the agencies still exist, some with their original names (i.e. Home of the Innocents).
- Ingram played an important role in establishing Kentucky’s child welfare systems.

Findings on Religious Institutions
- Surveys and formal reports suggested that many child caring institutions had funding and operational support from religious organizations.
- Religious organizations played a wide variety of roles:
  - conducting investigations
  - child placement
  - fundraising
  - direct care
- Many of the agencies still exist, some with their original names (i.e. Home of the Innocents).
- Ingram played an important role in establishing Kentucky’s child welfare systems.

Findings on Religious Institutions
- Surveys and formal reports suggested that many child caring institutions had funding and operational support from religious organizations.
- Religious organizations played a wide variety of roles:
  - conducting investigations
  - child placement
  - fundraising
  - direct care
- Many of the agencies still exist, some with their original names (i.e. Home of the Innocents).
- Ingram played an important role in establishing Kentucky’s child welfare systems.

Findings on Religious Institutions
- Surveys and formal reports suggested that many child caring institutions had funding and operational support from religious organizations.
- Religious organizations played a wide variety of roles:
  - conducting investigations
  - child placement
  - fundraising
  - direct care
- Many of the agencies still exist, some with their original names (i.e. Home of the Innocents).
- Ingram played an important role in establishing Kentucky’s child welfare systems.

Findings on Religious Institutions
- Surveys and formal reports suggested that many child caring institutions had funding and operational support from religious organizations.
- Religious organizations played a wide variety of roles:
  - conducting investigations
  - child placement
  - fundraising
  - direct care
- Many of the agencies still exist, some with their original names (i.e. Home of the Innocents).
- Ingram played an important role in establishing Kentucky’s child welfare systems.

Findings on Religious Institutions
- Surveys and formal reports suggested that many child caring institutions had funding and operational support from religious organizations.
- Religious organizations played a wide variety of roles:
  - conducting investigations
  - child placement
  - fundraising
  - direct care
- Many of the agencies still exist, some with their original names (i.e. Home of the Innocents).
- Ingram played an important role in establishing Kentucky’s child welfare systems.

Findings on Religious Institutions
- Surveys and formal reports suggested that many child caring institutions had funding and operational support from religious organizations.
- Religious organizations played a wide variety of roles:
  - conducting investigations
  - child placement
  - fundraising
  - direct care
- Many of the agencies still exist, some with their original names (i.e. Home of the Innocents).
- Ingram played an important role in establishing Kentucky’s child welfare systems.

Findings on Religious Institutions
- Surveys and formal reports suggested that many child caring institutions had funding and operational support from religious organizations.
- Religious organizations played a wide variety of roles:
  - conducting investigations
  - child placement
  - fundraising
  - direct care
- Many of the agencies still exist, some with their original names (i.e. Home of the Innocents).
- Ingram played an important role in establishing Kentucky’s child welfare systems.

Findings on Religious Institutions
- Surveys and formal reports suggested that many child caring institutions had funding and operational support from religious organizations.
- Religious organizations played a wide variety of roles:
  - conducting investigations
  - child placement
  - fundraising
  - direct care
- Many of the agencies still exist, some with their original names (i.e. Home of the Innocents).
- Ingram played an important role in establishing Kentucky’s child welfare systems.

Additional Findings: Science Focus in Archives, Not Religion
- collection suggests a deep interest in theories of development and attachment, criminology, psychiatry, nutrition, reproductive health, and physical activity
- science in Ingram’s time also explicitly incorporated eugenics

Discussion
- How state and federal governments oversee and regulate agencies with religious affiliations
- Scientific discourses from early 20th century were inseparable from questions of race

Questions
- How do scientific discussions about children and health address questions of race?
- How do those discussions inform policy?
- How do child welfare agencies continue to handle questions about religion and public funding?

Conclusion
Further research on specific institutional cultures of child welfare agencies would shed more light on the continued legacy of religious organizations in child welfare today.

Acknowledgements
Thank you to the Filson Historical Society for research support and to Princeton’s Center for Health and Wellbeing U.S. Health Policy Scholars Program.