

The High Cost of Jim Crow Institutions in the U.S.—Who Would Have Guessed?

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Janie Porter Barrett, in the U.S. State of Virginia, advocated community social services as one strategy to help correct injustice. The particular injustice that commanded her attention occurred when she saw an African American girl sentenced to an adult jail because there was no facility for African American girls in the State.

During the segregation period, states in the Old South had to have four institutions for delinquent children: one for White boys and another for African American boys, and one for White girls and another for African American girls. Of course, the Virginia legislature was willing to provide State funds to establish institutions for White boys and girls, but it did not extend this service to African American boys and girls. So Barrett mobilized funds to establish an institution for African American girls from Virginia's African American communities, and from White citizens who found merit in the project. First she established a Statewide Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, and then she worked with that Federation to raise \$5,000. In 1915, on a neglected farm outside Richmond, Barrett constructed what would later be called Barrett Learning Center for African American girls. Then, almost immediately after the institution was opened, the State legislature assumed control of its physical plant and all its programs. Barrett continued in her role as institutional superintendent, despite this change. (Barrett, J.P. [1917]. *Second Annual Report of the Superintendent, To the President and Members of the Board of Trustees. Peake's Turnout, Virginia: The Virginia State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs.*)

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