

Student Essay on Dorothea Dix's Work with the Mentally Insane

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Essay

Dorothea Dix realized that in her time, the Massachusetts legislature consisted of men. She developed ways to incorporate gender appeal to inspire feeling and concern for the abuse and neglect endured by the insane people. Disturbing records of many women in unbearable misery are too powerful for any man to ignore.

I proceed, Gentlemen, briefly to call your attention to the present state of Insane Persons confined within this Commonwealth, in cages, closets, cellars, stalls, pens! Chained, naked, beaten with rods and lashed into obedience (Dix, 481).

Dix puts accountability on the men in the legislature for these horrible conditions. She made the legislature feel responsible for letting the abuse on many insane people continue. She explained that the men had to power to end the suffering, which seemed strikingly obvious. The way she explained the abuse, misery, and the neglect was powerfully effective in displaying a need for immediate change.

Irritation of body, produced by utter filth and exposure, incited her to the horrid process of tearing off her skin by inches; her face, neck and person, were thus disfigured to hideousness (Dix, 482).

Gruesome details imbedded in her article inspired an enormous amount of feeling. Once Dix inspired feeling and concern, she had to inspire more reason.

In her records of the insane, Dix finds that the environment the insane are in make them incapable of cure, leaving them violently insane. She noted that in her recordings insane people could restore mind in comfortable and decent living conditions. Dix supports her argument affectively with events taken place in her recordings. The first subject was a woman who was determined a raging maniac. The maniac was sold to an old caring couple, which in due to good care caused the insane woman to become safe and sane to an extent. She showed through this all of humanity could be improved.