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ANNOTATION

Collins, Michael. "A Comparison of Racial Attitudes Among Students, Teachers, and Parents Toward Blacks in Selected Christian Brothers' Schools." Ed. D. dissertation, University of San Francisco, 1990, 187 pp.

To see Michael Collins raise the subject of achieving a more egalitarian multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-hued society with earnestness, and to see him use it as a fulcrum from which to critically examine racial attitudes in Lasallian educational communities, still demands attention by students, educators, and parents alike. In his doctoral dissertation, Michael Collins, FSC, documents racial attitudes in four Lasallian secondary schools¹—two in Chicago and two in San Francisco (8-9). He presents a quantitative case study based on three rationales: 1) "to determine if, and to what extent, those attitudes favorably reflect the racial justice goals of Catholics generally and Christian Brothers' schools specifically"; 2) "to determine if, and to what extent, students' attitudes reflect the attitudes of their parents"; and 3) "to determine if longer exposure to a Christian Brothers' school environment decreases racist attitudes" (9).

Collins completed his doctoral dissertation, "A Comparison of Racial Attitudes Among Students, Teachers Parents Towards Blacks in Selected Christian Brothers' Schools," in 1990 at the University of San Francisco. This statistical study of "four distinct yet similar high schools" reveals "how effectively a positive social justice consciousness is promoted" in the selected four Lasallian schools (8). Such data, Collins posits, is invaluable, suggesting that "fidelity to [John Baptist de La Salle, founder of the Brothers of the Christians Schools] demands it, the teachings of the [Catholic] Church endorse it, and the well-being of society requires it" (8).

The dissertation is arranged in five chapters. In the first chapter, Collins provides a detailed overview of the study in a series of sub-sections including purpose of the study, the nine research questions studied and the four accompanying assumptions, limitations inherent in the study, and an instructive sub-section concerning the study's overall significance. Here, Collins grounds his work that has enduring implications for Lasallian education and evangelization today: "The extent to which . . . Christian Brothers' schools . . . establish educational environments that are free of racism determines, to a significant degree, their relevance, their authenticity, their credibility, and their worth" (17). Collins acknowledges the implications this study has for Catholic schools generally.

In the second chapter, Collins presents a comprehensive review of literature covering four themes: 1) attitude theory; 2) racial attitudes; 3) racial attitudes and religion; and 4) Catholic schools and the race question (23). Drawing on the scholarship of John B. McConahay and others, this chapter identifies the "relatively new form of racial attitudes, behaviors, and anti-

¹ The designation a "Lasallian school" is the term commonly used today to designate schools, colleges, and other centers of education conducted by the Brothers of the Christian Schools and Lasallian Partners. A "Christian Brothers School" is the designation Collins uses in his dissertation.

Black feelings” emerging within the white population in the wake of the modern Civil Rights Movement. The onset of this social phenomenon is generally characterized as modern racism or social racism (28). Whether participants are more likely to express modern racist beliefs than old-fashioned racist beliefs is a significant aspect of the dissertation. The review also explores the connection between attitudes and religion. Collins’ observation that religious schools “must create an environment in which the internalization of their religious values occurs in the lives of their students” (36) corresponds with what Alvaro Rodriguez Echeverria, FSC, former Superior General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, writes in his third Pastoral Letter: “Education for justice should not be merely a specific subject area but a common thread that runs through the whole curriculum” (*Associated with the God of the Poor: Our consecrated life in the light of the 4th Vow*,” 25 December 2003).

The methodology employed in the study is described in chapter three. Collins discusses the questionnaire survey used to examine the nine research questions. Participants in the survey were “drawn from an experimentally accessible population that consists of ninth- and twelfth-grade White students, their parents, and religion teacher at four Christian Brothers’ schools” (49). The dissertation provides extensive details about the participant pool including demographic data (50-56, 59-60). Further, the Racism Scale, used as the instrument to measure racial attitudes (57-59), and the data analysis process, are each afforded much attention in the chapter.

Presenting the findings of the study based on a statistical analysis of the nine research questions, Collins divides chapter four into nine sections to consider the results of each question. Collins’ research includes these results: 1) White students are less likely to express old-fashioned prejudice towards Black people than they are to express more subtle forms of racist attitudes towards Black people (83); 2) students at both Chicago schools were more likely to express old-fashioned racist attitudes than students from either of the San Francisco [area] schools (86); 3) the students’ racial attitudes do not become more liberal the longer they have attended Lasallian schools (89); 4) similar to their children’s data, the parents’ Modern Racism scores generally are higher than their Old-Fashioned Racism scores (93). Specifically, parents from both Chicago schools were more likely to endorse modern racist attitudes than parents of students from either of the San Francisco [area] schools (98); 5) generally, the teacher’s Modern Racism and Old-Fashioned Racism scores seem to indicate less prejudiced attitudes than the students’ or parents’ data shows (100); 6) in general, the students’ old-fashioned and modern racial attitudes were less desirable than those of their religion teacher (108); and 7) the Old-Fashioned Racism scores of the White students significantly differed as a function of the amount of contact they had with Black people (118). Overall, students who have no contact with Black people have less desirable attitudes toward them than students who have either occasional or daily contact with Black people (120-121). Interpreting the findings, Collins asserts: “the foundations of racial attitudes are laid by parents who are the most significant in the formation of attitudes. However, as this study indicates, schools, nonetheless, should not underestimate their influence” (126).

The fifth chapter is far-flung with a summary, conclusions and implications, recommendations, and a few avenues for future research. Here are Collins’ six recommendations: 1) Establish a bias-free curriculum; 2) Establish a policy which articulates your school’s unequivocal commitment to racial justice; 3) Establish approaches that maximize the conditions necessary for

positive inter-group interactions, 4) Strengthen efforts to increase recruitment and retention of students of color; 5) Place special emphasis on inspiring and recruiting candidates of color for faculty and administrative positions; and 6) Establish in-service programs for administrators, teachers, and support-staff personnel (143-152).

This dissertation's serious reckoning with racial attitudes in four Lasallian schools should lead us to interrogate the state of racial attitudes and a commitment to racial justice today in Lasallian educational communities, as well as in the larger democratic public. Closing his text, Collins offers this meditation:

[T]he Christian Brothers [and now all Lasallian educators] should set for themselves the goal of producing students who are convinced that every soul has the potential to be great; who realize that all people are capable of great thoughts; and who believe that men and women of every color have the ability to perform great deeds. We should be unwilling to settle for anything less (153).