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## Boys Themselves: A Return to Single-Sex Education, by Michael Ruhlman

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The teachers, administrators, and parents of African American students have stories to tell as well. Even Caucasian parents whose children are enriched by the participation of African American students sitting beside them in Catholic school classrooms can add to the value of the dialogue on Catholic education and African Americans. The sacrifices and perseverance by many African American parents so that they would be able to afford Catholic education for their children is a success story within itself.

However, the documentation of these expanded voices can be told at a later time, perhaps in volume two. Given the paucity of such voices in *Growing up African American in Catholic Schools*, it is still a volume worth having on your personal bookshelf and in the libraries of Catholic and public schools.

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## **BOYS THEMSELVES: A RETURN TO SINGLE-SEX EDUCATION**

MICHAEL RUHLMAN. HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY, 1996.

*Reviewed by Fr. Timothy M. Kenney, S.M.*

**W**hat makes a school good? How do boys and girls learn together and separately? What is the best type of learning for boys and girls? Are some schools better for boys separate from girls and vice versa? Fortunately some private schools have resisted the trend to go from mostly single-gender institutions from their foundation to coeducation. To provide answers to these questions Michael Ruhlman spent a year observing boys in a boys' school in Cleveland, Ohio. The result of his study is *Boys Themselves*, an inside view of Ruhlman's observations, interactions, and experiences while visiting University School, a school for boys with two campuses: one for the lower grades (K-8) and the upper campus where Ruhlman spent his time among 370 high school boys (grades 9-12). Mr. Ruhlman, a graduate of the school, divides the book into three sections based on the three trimesters of the school: fall, winter, and spring. In each section he explores the various perceptions that he and others have of boys' schools. He questions in turn whether they are anachronistic, elitist, unhealthy, snobbish, oppressive, and Victorian. Ruhlman discovers a magic that seems to prevail in an all-boys' school environment. He also examines some of the latest research that has been conducted by such authors as Cornelius Riordan, the professor of edu-

cational sociology at Providence College in Rhode Island, and Valerie E. Lee and Anthony S. Bryk who published their research in the article "Effects of Single Sex Secondary Schools on Student Achievement and Attitudes" in the *Journal of Educational Psychology*.

The book often reads like a journal as the author explores the various lives of students like Kris Fletcher and the poetry that he writes for his teacher, Nancy Lester. He reflects on Nick Zinn and the relationship that he has with his teacher, Paul Bailin. We read about teachers like Carol Pribble, the drama instructor, and some of the experiences that she has in conducting her rehearsals for the musical *Big River*.

Ruhlman attempts to show that there is a distinctive culture in a boys' school that is quite different from a co-ed environment. In a boys' school we see deep boyhood friendships develop; boys explore values and issues that are pertinent to their development. At University School an interesting custom is that every senior must deliver a speech before the student body in order to graduate. Besides this being an interesting way to begin the school day, these senior speeches provide another forum for the boys who are becoming young men to share some of their deepest feelings. We see this in Kevin Feder, the class clown, who talks about his brother Darin, born mentally and physically handicapped, and the courage and happiness that Darin sought in his life as he faced horrible pain; or Brian, who describes how he felt as a chubby awkward freshman at University High and the jealousies he experienced in his home while growing up.

Throughout the book Ruhlman records many of the speeches, testimonies, and daily encounters of the headmaster of University School, Dr. Richard Hawley. Hawley is a strong advocate of boys' schools and among his colleagues is considered a guru on this topic. Reading *Boys Themselves* one comes to sense the passion in Hawley's words as he addresses the topic of boys' schools, boys' development, and the uniqueness that are part of this kind of learning. In one of his speeches Hawley says, "Each of our boys has a spirit and that spirit must find its voice" (p. 138).

On the surface we see in *Boys Themselves* a description of a school dealing with the same issues as any other school: student misbehavior, burnout, different styles in teaching methodologies, all of which are documented by the author. What I found most interesting is the inside view on what teenage boys feel about issues of life, religion, war, and other social concerns. Boys' schools provide a safe, structured, and nonthreatening social environment that encourages young men to share their thoughts and feelings with others and to openly discuss ideas or concerns. Young men in boys' schools often experience a comfort level that enables them to develop into compassionate and caring contributors to society without concern for the masculine stereotypes that they often have to deal with for approval.

I recommend *Boys Themselves* for anyone who is interested in exploring the topic of single-gender education as it applies to a boys' school. This book is a serious invitation to further the dialogue on this most important topic for our time.

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