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## GROWING UP AFRICAN AMERICAN IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

JACQUELINE JORDAN IRVINE AND MICHELE FOSTER, EDS.  
TEACHERS COLLEGE PRESS, 1996.

*Reviewed by Betty Taylor, Ed.D.*

This book is an interesting, well researched, edited volume of African American students' experience in Catholic education. *Growing Up African American in Catholic Schools* makes one ponder issues involving the reasons African American parents send their children to Catholic schools when they are not Catholic, permit them to attend schools with religious icons so different from their own cultural heritage, and still expect the children to succeed beyond family and community expectations. This text was written at a time when the place of Catholicism in African American culture was (as it still is) being questioned, educational philosophy and concepts related to the education of African American children were being re-analyzed, and dioceses were choosing to close urban churches and schools. These issues often limit the options and opportunities for African American children to participate in Catholic education.

The formalized documentation of research throughout the chapters makes this book appropriate for Catholic school educators, as well as educators who are addressing the issues of African Americans in public school settings.

*Growing Up African American in Catholic Schools* is divided into two sections. The first section presents a cultural-historical and socio-political analysis of African American Catholic educational experiences through case studies and a literature review of major Catholic school population and achievement research over a period of 25 years.

Two chapters of particular interest in this section are ones that concentrate on the often overlooked roles that African Americans have played in organizing Catholic schools and other Catholic institutions. V. P. Franklin and Vernon C. Polite detail the important roles of African American religious communities and the Committee for the Advancement of Colored Catholics. The Committee was formed in 1919 to secure clergy for African American Catholics, administer to their spiritual needs, and assist with African American student access to Catholic education.

The second section of *Growing Up African American in Catholic Schools* focuses on several other contrasting, individual experiences of African Americans while attending Catholic schools. The reflections written by Catholic and non-Catholic individuals who attended Catholic schools

occurred in geographically diverse locations. Mary Dilworth, a practicing Catholic, and Michele Foster, a non-Catholic, attended predominately, Caucasian Catholic schools in the North. Jacqueline Irvine, a non-Catholic, attended an African American, segregated Catholic school in the South. Hence, the reader is exposed to information about pedagogical and child rearing practices from different geographical areas and religious affiliated perspectives.

I am intrigued by the search for ethnic and cultural identity by African American students and the ways they accommodated to the culture of the Catholic school community without totally adjusting their thinking in this area. Perhaps the reason lies in the work of the noted, developmental epistemologist, Jean Piaget. Essentially, Piaget's cognitive learning theory suggests that children take in information (assimilation), use the information to reconstruct their own schematic framework (accommodation), and then begin to form new intellectual structures and act upon them (adjustment).

*Growing Up African American in Catholic Schools* elaborates upon several points of view that are common to my experience in Catholic education. One view is the expectation of African American families to achieve and "do better than" prior generations with the nurturing of students by the community. The parish community consists of parents, teachers, staff, and the religious communities who support African American students. Also, the nurturing of students is accomplished by the African American family and community outside of the Catholic church structure.

An additional view has as its main focal point the importance of developing a strong identity as an African American. The book treats the reader to several examples of school communities that incorporated the many gifts and contributions of African Americans into school and church life. Some of the authors seem to only touch the surface of their interactions and schooling experiences with classmates, teachers, and members of religious communities, while other authors' stories resound of determined efforts and difficulties throughout their Catholic school life.

I am extremely impressed with the balanced nature of personal perspectives about segregation, integration, and academic achievement of African American students in *Growing Up African American in Catholic Schools*. I am saddened by the memoirs of authors who were emotionally wounded by insensitive teachers and administrators because the Catholic school environment, in many instances, reflected the conservative nature of the greater society as it relates to race and class.

Given that some of the authors documented insensate experiences during their years of Catholic school, many "telling my own stories" recounted acts of kindness and strands of educational, career, and life successes. It would have been useful to hear the voices of those whose commitment to African American students made their success possible.

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-

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