

CCG NEWS

Christians for the Common Good

Editors' Introduction

This issue of CCGNews, by the decision of the editors Drs. Will Cohen and Christian Krokus, and in line with the message of the Provost (and current acting President) Dr. Jeffrey Gingerich excerpted in the adjacent grey box, offers reflection on the University's history of mock slave auction fundraisers that came to the attention of many of us for the first time when Ms. Glynis Johns, founder of the Black Scranton Project, presented archival material on it at a Community-Based Learning (CBL) Zoom meeting in late February. Following an introductory piece by Dr. Cohen, two students, Tiannah Adams and Koebe Diaz, both juniors and cabinet members of the Black Student Union, share their reactions, reflecting on the experience of Black students on campus today, and encouraging the University to continue taking steps on the path of healing. Ms. Johns encourages attending both to the troubling areas and to the bright spots of our history with racial justice, using what we learn to tell a more accurate story about ourselves in order to be able to move forward most constructively. Finally, Fr. Patrick Rogers of the Jesuit Center reflects personally on his own learning curve, points us toward Catholic and Jesuit resources for addressing the sin of racism, and calls us to empathize with those who suffer its sting. The work of truth and reconciliation is many-faceted and ongoing, and we are thankful to each contributor for their desire to take up this work in the meaningful ways that they do here. We also invite those who read this issue of CCGNews – especially current students but also recent graduates – and who would like to offer responses to send reflections on any of the material contained in this

newsletter to Christian Krokus at christian.krokus@scranton.edu or to Will Cohen at will.cohen@scranton.edu. Responses should be no longer than 500 words. Depending on the number and quality of responses received, we will consider publishing them either in the regularly scheduled Fall 2021 CCGNews issue or in a special issue to be published over the summer.

EXCERPT FROM [LETTER OF PROVOST GINGERICH](#) ADDRESSED TO THE CAMPUS COMMUNITY ON FEBRUARY 26, 2021:

“... These offensive activities [the mock slave auction fundraisers of the past] trivialized the grave history of chattel slavery and systemic anti-Black racism in this country. We apologize for pain caused at the time by the racist and sexist character of these events and today as our campus community, especially Black students and employees, and the local Black community are reacquainted with them. This is an opportunity for institutional reflection, learning and, most importantly, action.

... We are committed to combating systemic racism on our campus and in our nation, and recognize – especially ... in keeping with a Jesuit examination of conscience – that a truthful airing of past wrongs is necessary for present-day justice, healing, solidarity and reconciliation.”

ABOUT CCG NEWS

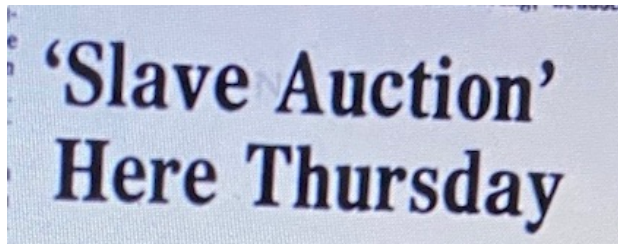
CCG News is a publication of Peace and Justice Studies in collaboration with Christians for the Common Good, a reading and discussion group co-founded in 2017 by Will Cohen and Christian Krokus, faculty members in the Department of Theology / Religious Studies at the University of Scranton. The views expressed in CCG News do not necessarily reflect those of the University or the Department of Theology / Religious Studies.

Fundraisers, Self-Examination, and the Common Good

By Will Cohen

From the 1950s through the '80s, student clubs and university offices at the University of Scranton held mock “slave auction” fundraisers that as far as we can tell were not intended to hurt anybody. They were meant to be fun – a way for college students to play for a few hours at either having control over, or being controlled by, another human being . . . and all for a good cause (e.g., the yearbook). And people apparently did have fun, to go by the popularity of these events; a great many high schools, colleges and other institutions across the country held them for years, and some still do hold them today under different names.

Suffice it to say that the ethics of holding such events are questionable on multiple grounds. As the University continues to reflect on them and explore their history and context we will gain further insight. The events in some places in the country appear to have had something of a Greek or Roman cultural motif, and of course slavery in the ancient world wasn't racialized as North American chattel slavery was. Whatever the intention of the fundraisers in a particular instance, their impact is another matter.



Scranton Times-Tribune, November 2, 1976

Indeed when these events took place on our campus, their ugly resonance with our nation's own history of oppression of Black people was by no means lost on everyone. A 1973 student editorial in the campus newspaper decried the fundraising idea for both its sexism and its racism, saying of the latter that it was “as if the freshman class had been contemplating the organization of [a] Scranton Chapter of the Ku Klux Klan” (*The Aquinas*, Student Forum, Feb. 28, 1973).

One can hardly imagine that mock slave auction fundraisers were ever held at historically Black colleges like Spellman or Howard. Why mock slave auction fundraisers could continue to happen here as long and as many times as they did is because we were a predominantly White institution. We still are. We aren't as predominantly White as we once were, and it's now been more than thirty years since the last mock slave auction was held on campus that we know of. Nevertheless our way of responding to it now as it's brought back to our attention will tell us a lot about how different, or how similar, we are today to how we were then in terms of our self-awareness as a community.

Two tendencies, not just on our campus but across the country, have the potential to manifest themselves. One is a reluctance to dredge up negative old history, a desire to move on, to focus on the positives of how far we've come from the days of slavery and its legacy of segregation and how generous we are as a community now. The other tendency is to see painful chapters of the past as ones that will continue to cast their shadow into the present until we've come to face them more fully and honestly than we've yet done. In this second tendency, the wounds of the past from which we don't flinch or run hold out the promise of our being able to live more freely and truthfully with one another today. Reflecting on the many “historical events that make us ashamed of our humanity,” Pope Francis writes the following in his most recent encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (On Fraternity and Social Friendship): “Nowadays, it is easy to be tempted to turn the page, to say that all these things happened long ago and we should look to the future. For God's sake, no! We can never move forward without remembering the past; we do not progress without an honest and unclouded memory” (§249).

With an authentic sense of self-worth (rooted in the conviction of being unconditionally loved, rather than in self-righteousness) should come an ability to hear criticism that painfully forces us to reevaluate how well we have been treating others, hearing *their* point of view. From time to time we should be able

to be unpleasantly surprised by such input from others that rates us less highly than we would have thought. This is what enables us to change, to grow. The 20th century French Jesuit patristic scholar Jean Daniélou aptly defined sin as “the refusal to grow”. If we tell a too uncomplicated story of ourselves as being invariably good and kind and generous, hearing that we need to change just doesn’t fit. Who, us? To the kingdom of Judah in the late 7th c. BC God says, “I will bring you to judgment for saying, ‘I have not sinned’” (Jer. 2:35).

St. Ignatius’ *Exercises* urge us not to try and tackle every shortcoming all at the same time. In our country and on college campuses, anti-Black racism isn’t the only issue needing to be addressed, but it’s an important one. Jesuit institutions have an opportunity in our time, not because they’re innocent of the stain of racism that has racked our nation but precisely because they’re implicated in it, to play a leading role in our nation’s healing by showing what it looks like to face our past and our ongoing faults. Georgetown’s [slavery archives project](#) has already established itself as a model of the humility and truthfulness that make healing possible. And not only the massive sin of the actual holding and then selling of enslaved people for

profit, but also even the relatively minor sin of a mock slave auction is featured on Georgetown’s site, in a spirit of truth and reconciliation.

Our own university has taken important steps to make space for this same kind of truth-telling as we have redoubled our commitment this past year to having the difficult discussions about racial justice that need to happen in order for us to better understand and care for one another. The Black Student Union has been established. Numerous faculty workshops have been held. Authors and activists have been invited to address issues from anti-racism and White space to the difficult experiences of many African Americans in the Catholic Church. New African-American faculty members are coming in the Fall as part of an initiative to build a Black studies program and increase our academic focus on anti-Black racism and other forms of racial injustice. These initiatives, and everything we do going forward to build on them, lay the groundwork for a community in which we may hope that ever fewer fresh occasions of racial injustice and insensitivity arise, and that an ever deepening appreciation of their impact enables us to work through them humbly and charitably when they do.

Interview with Tiannah Adams and Koebe Diaz of the BSU

In conversation with Drs. Christian Krokus and Will Cohen of the Theology/Religious Studies department, students Tiannah Adams (TA) and Koebe Diaz (KD) offered their reflections about the mock slave auctions and shared their broader concerns about the experience of Black students and other students of color at the University of Scranton.

Tiannah Adams, class of 2022, is a Psychology major and the founding president of the Louis Stanley Brown Black Student Union. She is from Harlem, NY, and she attended Loyola School in NYC. After graduation, she plans to pursue a J.D. and a Ph.D. in social psychology.

Koebe Diaz, class of 2022, is a Psychology major and a founding cabinet member of the Louis Stanley Brown Black Student Union. She is from Dumont, NJ. After

graduation, she plans to pursue an M.A. in public health and a Ph.D. in clinical psychology.

On initial responses to the revelation about the history of mock slave auctions on campus.

KD: It was in the Cabinet group chat for the Black Student Union that I first heard about it, and I was really confused. It took me a while to understand what the events were and to realize that they happened in the 70s and 80s. When I brought it up to other students, many didn’t know about it and didn’t really care to follow up, which was really sad. In one of my classes, my professor tried to bring it up for discussion, but in that class I’m the only Black person and no one claimed to have heard of it or seemed to care to hear more.

TA: I was helping host the event where the news was dropped, and I was in complete shock at first. Although it was explained during the event, I wasn't aware of what it actually was. Once I did more research, it started to impact me. I expected everyone around me to be in shock and to be as angry as I was. When I didn't receive that response it made me more angry, but also, I guess, it gave me a sense of loneliness.

KD: With people close to me, like in my inner circle there was a lot of conversation and it was comforting because it was like, "Okay, they can understand me," but outside of that there was really nothing being done. There were no conversations happening outside of that and, like Tiannah said, it did make you feel alone because no one's talking about it, so how do you know if your feelings are even that valid?

TA: It was an invalidating experience because you don't know if you're overreacting or if this is something that actually deserves to spark outrage.

On broader concerns about the experiences of Black students and students of color at the University of Scranton.

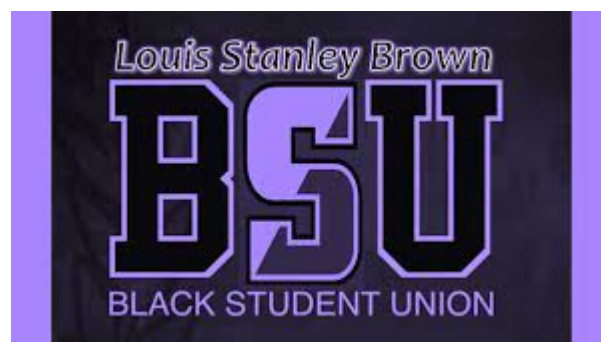
KD: The atmosphere that is created at the University is kind of like there's no racism here: "Everything's good, everyone loves each other." A few days after we heard the news, or maybe even the day after, however, I saw people I'm friendly with posting about how much they love the University: "I love it here," "What an amazing community," and it really broke my heart, because when something like this happens that directly affects me it doesn't seem to resonate with them and they don't seem to feel any sympathy.

Living in the dorms, you sometimes hear racial slurs being yelled and shouted. Being the only Black person on your floor, you find yourself wondering whether to say something – "If I say something, will it just make things worse?" But if you don't say anything then you're the one that has to carry the burden of hearing those things. You don't know what others are thinking and even to try to find out can be uncomfortable, so you feel

alone. When those interpersonal racist incidents or things like the mock slave auctions come up, it takes an emotional toll on a person. I found that the first year, if you're lucky you can ignore some of the racist things that happen, like the micro aggressions, the little things. But it starts to pile up and after a while it gets to be too much and the things that you used to be able to tolerate, they set you off and you can't handle anymore. Other students could get that email from the Provost and gloss over it, and move on the next day and not have to sit up at night thinking about it. After I heard about the news, I went home for a few days.

On the founding of the Black Student Union

TA: I first got the idea in the second semester of my freshman year to start a Black Student Union, and I started checking into it the first semester of my sophomore year. Soon after that I was told I couldn't create the BSU because it would be exclusive of other students at the University, and I was told that multiple times. I met with the Kemps* pretty regularly to create a plan of what to do next, and then last summer I met with the provost [Dr. Gingerich] about ways to increase diversity at the university. That's when that idea of a BSU started to become finalized.



On some recent positive experiences of support at the University of Scranton

TA: I appreciated the email that Dr. Gingerich sent out. Also, the BSU was invited to be involved in the searches for more Black faculty on campus, and in meetings with Fr. Pilarz we spoke of possible curriculum changes. For example, usually we only learn about historical Black figures in black history

courses, but we wanted to ensure that we're learning about Black figures across the board.

KD: I've found trust within individual faculty members.

On how to improve the experiences of Black students and other students of color at the University of Scranton

TA: I know they might be working on this now, but having a separate admissions event for Black students and other students of color so that they'll be able to be familiarized with the campus before orientation would be nice.

KD: It's important to hear from your Black students to understand their experiences, but it's also important not to overburden them. At some point it's time to get to work and take action that helps them.

TA: A physical space for the BSU would be very helpful. I think many people don't understand why space is necessary. "Why do Black students need a special space? They have the entire campus." But realistically we don't have any space on campus that we can call our own. I think it's hard to understand, if you're not in a Black student or student of color's position, how the entire campus is a White space and how important it is for Black students to have a space to debrief and be our most open and comfortable selves.

On how, going forward, the University of Scranton might address the mock slave auction fundraisers and any similar unfortunate aspects of its history.

TA: I think as a Jesuit university it's important to reconcile, but you can't reconcile without understanding your past. Everything that has happened in the University's past needs to come to light, and then we can work on reconciliation and rebuilding the relationship with Black students and other students of color on campus. But that can't be done unless everything else is discovered.

KD: The things that happened in the past are still affecting what's happening now. Unless we address what happened in the past we're not going to be able to move forward. If we were able, as Tiannah was saying, to reconcile and come to terms with what has happened and make amends, fix the harm that was done, that would go a lot farther than what we've been currently doing, not even just at the University but I guess as a society as a whole.

TA: The school claims that it's committed to being anti-racist, but you can't be anti-racist without acknowledging your past. It is a risk, but hopefully that will make the school better in the long run. I was going to point to the Georgetown University Slavery Archive. I think what hurt the most for me with the mock slave auctions was that some people knew about it and didn't say anything. If the University took responsibility for everything that has happened in the past, I would respect that more than just having things brought up at an event.

**Dr. Joel Kemp and Dr. Gail Kemp, African American scholars who have gone on to teach at other universities, were tenure-track faculty members in Theology and Psychology, respectively, until the end of the Spring 2020 semester.*

Interview with Glynis Johns of the Black Scranton Project

The Community-Based Learning (CBL) Talk in February, at which Ms. Glynis Johns, Founder and Executive Director of the Black Scranton Project, shared research about past mock slave auction fundraisers at The University of Scranton, was jointly hosted by Ms. Julie Schumacher Cohen, CBL Board Chair and Assistant Vice President for Community Engagement / Government Affairs, and the Louis Stanley Brown Black Student Union and other campus offices. Ms.

Schumacher Cohen subsequently interviewed Ms. Johns about her research and about how the University of Scranton might partner with her work at the Black Scranton Project. Dr. Christian Krokus edited the interview.

How did you initially find out about these "mock slave auction fundraisers" as a phenomenon and

how do you situate them as part of the national and regional legacies and current challenges of predominantly white institutions?

I saw that these kinds of events had happened in Northeastern Pennsylvania, and given my relationship with the University, I felt it was important to look into it. We can't progress if we don't talk about how the University used to address race and how that might have been harmful then and now. I knew what I discovered could be triggering, and I didn't want people to point fingers at, or target the University. I wanted to share this from an educational standpoint. My presentation was meant to document this history, process it, and use it as a call to action. The University isn't perfect. These slave auction fundraisers were not the worst thing in the world, but they are still something to be addressed. This is an example of an event that, as a Black woman, I would not have wanted to participate in. I would not have wanted to be a "slave". I would not have wanted to be a "slave owner".



I've also found that in the late 1960's, white University of Scranton students showed up in large numbers to stand up for fair and equal housing in the City and to fight for racial justice for the Black community. So even around when these slave auction fundraiser events were going on, some students were also engaged civically on behalf of Black residents of Scranton.

You mentioned that you shared this research with the University as a way for us to move forward in a constructive way. That aligns with our Jesuit tradition of self-examination, truth and reconciliation and with how Bryan

Stevenson of the Equal Justice Initiative has urged institutions to have their own "truth-telling process." Why do you think it's important for the University and other institutions to know and share our history?

I felt it was important to bring this story to students, especially during Black History Month and with the emphasis this past year on racial justice, inclusion, telling stories, and letting people tell their stories. I wanted to share this in order for them to have the information and to have a conversation – to say, "This is part of our legacy at the University; this belongs to us – good or bad – what do we want to do with it?" I think in the city of Scranton as a whole, we can have trouble with transparency and addressing issues that affect minority groups.

The Black Scranton Project is always on the move – from organizing the pan-African flag raising at City Hall to being honored by U.S. Senator Bob Casey in the Congressional Record to various historical and mixed-media projects online and off. What's next for you and the BSP, and how might University of Scranton students, faculty and staff collaborate and support your efforts?

We are working on opening our Community Center – we will have a fun, Juneteenth block party which will be a soft opening of our space. It will include a fundraiser to support the Black Scranton Project's work. Through a coffee collaboration with Electric City Roasting Company, Zummo's will be selling Juneteenth Java. June is also Black men's health matters awareness month. It's going to be an action-packed and fun month.

Once the Center is established, I would like to do some research projects with different departments and students at the University. It would be great to have a community-based learning initiative where students can publish articles on our website, create an exhibit, or build on the "Uncommon Knowledge" stories series. For the Black Student Union in particular, I hope they see this Center as a place to have meetings, have events, work with youth in Scranton, a resource that they can utilize.

The University is in the footprint of the downtown area, where the Black community was historically.

Downtown has always been a hub – Black people were working in the Hotel Casey; they were domestic workers, day laborers, moving coal. As that historic neighborhood on Adams Avenue was erased with redevelopment and even as downtown or Hill Section buildings are taken down now – for better or worse – the stories of Black residents can disappear. Together we need to collect these stories, because historically, Black communities have not been written about enough.

Thank you for the time and energy that you put into researching Scranton’s Black history, including University history. We know the wellbeing of the city and the campus – the people of this community – are intertwined, including on how we make progress toward racial justice. Anything else you want to add about how to be partners in this work?

I see myself as having a really strong relationship with the University of Scranton. We've done a lot of good work together already in the past couple of years, so I definitely want to continue the relationship with the Black Scranton Project. With the impact of the pandemic, I'm really looking at what resources and institutions we have to help our local Black students be prepared for life and career choices. It would be great to have volunteers from the University run workshops, tutor, and help with homework. I want to be able to take what I learned from the University of Success program and see how we can partner to extend programming like that to students of color at our Center. I think partnering with the University as an institution of higher education will be valuable not only to the Black community but to the city of Scranton as well.

Interview with Fr. Patrick Rogers, S.J., of the Jesuit Center

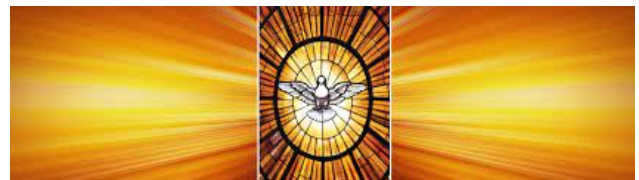
Fr. Rogers, the Executive Director of the Jesuit Center, was interviewed for by Ryan Sheehan, J.D., the Jesuit Center’s Assistant Director.

What was your personal response to the death of George Floyd and the renewed focus and awareness on racism as brought on by the events of last summer?

The death of George Floyd brought into sharp focus the continuing reality of racism in our country. For an officer of the state to kneel on the neck of another with what at the time seemed to be such impunity was not only a gross abuse of power, it was a complete denial of that man’s humanity. It was painful to watch on so many levels and something I found very troubling. Mr. Floyd’s call to his mother as he lay their having his life choked out of him echoed our own anguished calls to Mary, the mother of Christ. His was a call for mercy, for sympathy, and for life.

While I have taught and discussed issues surrounding racism for many years, I think and pray about the many things to which I simply have not paid enough attention. I was reminded, in a

way I am not very proud to admit, that I need to alter, or increase, my focus on race and racism. Mr. Floyd’s death (along with Breonna Taylor and others) was a wake-up call for me. I personally feel like I can’t ignore the underlying issues that cause incidents like this to happen with an all too regular familiarity. As a Jesuit whose role in the Church is to proclaim the Gospel, justice demands that I lend my voice to anti-racism initiatives.



How does our tradition of Jesuit education – rooted in our Catholic and Jesuit mission - call us to respond differently to racism?

Catholic Social Teaching, Catholic Intellectual Tradition, the call of the Bishops, the Jesuit martyrs, and countless other examples are parts of our faith and tradition that inform us of how to treat our brothers and sisters and how we are to direct instruments of power and privilege. To put

it simply, the Catholic church, and by extension Catholic and Jesuit higher education, possesses all the tools needed to address racism in this country.

This year the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU) put out a great resource called [*Eyes to See: An Anti-Racism Examen*](#). The website [contains a page](#) that urges Jesuit colleges and universities to explore their histories related to race very much in the pattern of St. Ignatius' Examen. "The Examen invites us to take an honest, unvarnished look at our institution's past, not to be paralyzed by it, but to know it and discern a way forward. When have we been proud of being an inclusive and equitable community? When have we failed our students, faculty and staff of color?"

I really believe the AJCU's Examen helps us to draw out what our tradition tells us to do regarding how we treat others during this refocusing on racism. What you see playing out in the media and in politics often serves only to divide us. It certainly doesn't lend itself to the discourse that may be necessary to change hearts and minds. I can sometimes be drawn to anger at those who deny racism or don't take it seriously, but I can also recognize that healing and reconciliation are part of a process that we are called to undertake. For all of those who labor at this University, or anyone that has influence with the youth of this country, we are called to take the patient approach of proclaiming the truth in what we teach so as to help change the very structures of racism. Our Jesuit Mission can teach us not only how to deal with racism but how to deal and relate to one another.

What are your thoughts regarding the University's response to racism?

The University, at all levels, has worked very hard in addressing racism. From bringing in nationally recognized speakers to looking very closely at the University's own shortcomings concerning race relations, we have had a diligent and measured examination of racism and what steps we can take to address it. Most importantly, we strive to do so from our core of Mission as a Catholic and Jesuit University. For example, what does Catholic Social Teaching tell us to do regarding racism? How does the example of Pope Francis and related encyclicals

inform our understanding of racism as a University? The more we strive to address the issues of individual and institutional racism from our Jesuit charism, the more likely we are to cultivate a response that is not only an appropriate response to racism, but one that is also enduring.

What are the next steps for the University?

The University needs to continue to do the good work of fighting against racism. We must also look towards innovative ways of engaging our students in this moment in our nation's history. While young people are amenable to conversations regarding racism and their complicity in personal and institutional racism, their busy lives sometimes prevent them from taking part in the necessary conversations regarding race in America. Anti-racism work needs to be infused into relevant areas of the curriculum and done in a way that embraces our Catholic and Jesuit Mission.

We must also be willing to take a step back and listen. What do our students and staff of color offer us in the way of advice and needed criticism? Many of us, myself included, don't always have the perspective or experience needed to understand what changes need to be made so that our university community can be made more just regarding racism. We have to trust our young people. We have to listen to those whose voices have been silenced for so long under the sinful yoke of racism so that we can learn from them. Most of all, we need to have faith that we can continue, together, to guide this University forward along the path of justice toward a day when racism in all of its forms will be abolished.