
Addressing Race and Class in the Lasallian Legacy of Social Justice

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The legacy of Saint John Baptist de La Salle is marked by pioneering the values of universal education in a world so economically stratified that the thought of education being attained by any class other than the nobility was radical. The Lasallian mission is, among a myriad of articulations, manifested in its five Lasallian Core Principles,³ but how these principles--themselves only 30 years old and known primarily in the USA context of schools--should be actualized depends on the historical circumstances in which Lasallians find themselves. A seventeenth century concern for the poor in France becomes broader social justice concerns in the more global economy of the twenty-first century. Additionally, how these concerns are articulated and practiced is profoundly different for both points in history. Modern issues regarding equity and justice involve considerations that were not socially relevant or were epistemologically inaccessible to De La Salle given his time in history. Negotiating conditions of social stratification while pioneering education for the poor certainly involved issues of classism commonly found today; but he did not have to contend with racial issues in education, issues of educational choice, or diversity such as those present in the contemporary era.

Every now and then a reevaluation of what the Lasallian Core Principles mean, how they translate to the world, and what one ought to do, are necessary questions.⁴ More urgently now than before given the monumental socio-political shifts in the last several years, and the accelerating rate that technology and globalization are changing assumptions of human behavior. To properly judge De La Salle's contribution to the world, and adequately recontextualize the values Lasallians understand to be important historically, it is important to discuss both the successes and the pitfalls of De La Salle's own legacy. The legacy of De La Salle may seem as if it was entirely going against the grain of classism in its fight for educating those who previously would have been no concern to educate, and even the thought of doing so would be regarded with contempt by French elites. However, there were fair amounts of classism reinforced subtly and not-subtly in the ways De La Salle and his Brothers instructed their pupils, because in order to battle for universal education (which in principle is an anti-classist institution) some compromises to French elitism had to be made. De La Salle formed a mutually dependent trinity between social etiquette derived from the French elite of his day, God, and education that was embedded with rigid ideas of social hierarchy and decorum. The hyper awareness of social hierarchy with accompanying gestures and behaviors he instructed as decorum, reinforced ideas of ranking amongst people, and many other examples discussed later contributed to a not-so-subtle nod toward classism. Despite De La Salle's radical approach to education, there was still much adherence to the conventions of his day that permeated multiple levels of his pedagogy.

His legacy and its continuing impact concerning Lasallian education today requires an understanding of power and cultural reproduction to really frame the problem of intersectional race and class in the twenty-first century. Without a formalized understanding of how power shapes ideology or cultural assumptions and their dissemination, we cannot coherently

understand the evolution of this intersection or how issues of classism from De La Salle's time have been tenaciously sustained and replicated in the contemporary era. As such, we examine the inherent power dynamics inherent in the discourse of educational value in Lasallian pedagogical practice. To that end, we utilize Bourdieu's theory of social capital development, specifically, his concepts of habitus, field, and to a lesser extent hysteresis that will guide our examination of classical and contemporary Lasallian pedagogy as it relates to the reproduction of social inequalities related to class and race in Lasallian higher education institutions. This historical comparison concludes with a call to re-evaluate the modern Lasallian mission based on a more critical and shared discussion of our five Lasallian Core Principles.

The goal of this essay is to examine more specifically the ways in which social inequalities are reproduced and negotiated in Lasallian education. More specifically, we are focused on the intersection of class and race in the reproduction of those conditions of inequality. As such, class is defined as both material (i.e., income) and aspirational (a goal attained through the achievement of specific qualities and skills). These constructions will be tied to the Bourdieuan concepts of field and habitus in the following section, but it is important to note the role of prestige in the reproduction of classist educational imperatives in both classical and modern Lasallian pedagogy. A more specific focus on prestige defines our examination of classism, specifically how prestige influences the requisite formation of a habitus that is broadly understood and establishes barriers to the accessibility of opportunity and the ability to engage the promise of upward mobility long tied to formal education.

In subsequent sections, the concept of prestige will be examined further, primarily regarding the expectations held by non-white students in modern American society. The case is made that for non-white students, prestige is understood to be synonymous with whiteness.⁵ As a consequence, we argue that evidenced strategies of non-white students to achieve prestige in the context of upward mobility, also carries with it significant subjective costs and establishes clear barriers for those seeking the economic advantages of a formal (particularly, higher) education. Whiteness, as conceptually imbricated with prestige, clearly must have a use-value. Consequently, if whiteness has a use-value and is socially recognizable, it operates as a form of social currency or social capital. And because whiteness is categorically defined as social capital in this case it does not have a limited or discrete value; that is, whiteness can be accumulated, apportioned, and operates on a gradient between non-white to white.

When accepting the premise that whiteness can be a form of social currency with discernible social use value, it becomes possible to understand the structural intersection of race and class in both historical and contemporary contexts. The idea of white-passing and the ability for non-whites to invest into a white hegemony is presented as a social predicament that further perpetuates the stratification of social classes. While also arguing that while whiteness can change to the benefit of those in positions of definitional authority, just because non-whites may have the opportunity or capacity to be white-passing does not mean that this will sever the ties between whiteness and class in the long run. In fact the opposite is argued here, that it is doubly harmful for the part of the population that lacks the capacities to be white-passing and further cements the non-white persons as the "other."

Lastly, a discussion of what Lasallians can hope to accomplish with an understanding of the intersection of race and class is discussed. While it may be difficult to find a direct course of action to address a systemic issue that involves more than just higher education, it is not impossible to address the issue as one of requisite Lasallian concern and thus construct a platform that invites other parties to help combat adversities that accompany the socioeconomic entanglements of race and class through a new discourse guided by our core principles. The five Lasallian Core Principles can be understood as universal principles that others can adopt to further the same mission, and in this case enhance at least two values: an inclusive community for the sake of social justice and concern for the poor.

On Power

At the heart of all social transformative projects is the practice of power, which is, of course, also true of Lasallian educational outreach and practice. The context of that practice highlights the ways in which discursive power is managed to manufacture change or promote a desirable behavior. The nature of that power is a subject of significant study and debate (e.g., Dahl, 1957; Domhoff, 1978; Gaventa, 1982; Foucault, 1980).⁶ Power need not be defined exclusively as coercion. In fact, power can be largely cooperative with coercive undertones in the sense that actors are given limited agency due to restrictions based on positions within their environment or “field” but retaining agency to maneuver within a given range of possible actions. This differs from narrower conceptualizations of power as being purely hegemonic. As Scott (1990) notes, these primarily coercive definitions of power create a less substantial, “thin” theory of power:

The thin theory of false consciousness . . . maintains only that the dominant ideology achieves compliance by convincing subordinate groups that the social order in which they live is natural and inevitable (72).

In this sense, we can say the cooperative element of power is derived from resignation toward playing the “game.”

However, resignation and cooperation cannot be achieved without some form of incentive for compliance. Few would resign themselves to a program that was entirely restrictive with zero reward in the long-term. Perhaps a more effective way of understanding how power functions in this context is through Bourdieu’s (1977; 1980) concepts of habitus and field, in the sense that they provide a theoretical means for examining individual choices within institutional environments. More to the point, Bourdieu’s focus on social capital is an effective way in which to understand how these relationships employ incentive structures in a reflexive context without reducing power to a system of unilateral control where actors are either victims or oppressors.

Viewing the mechanism of social capital as a means of incentivizing desirable behavior/actions is particularly salient in a Lasallian context. Some form of social recognition, or non-physical reward, can be used to acquire compliance because it brings with it comparative benefits within respective groups. In this way, non-monetary capital can affect the opportunities an actor encounters and may lead to opportunities for future material gain (as will be shown in the following section). Adherence to the “social order” mentioned in the Scott quote earlier is constructed via the power of social capital, consequently leading to formations of strategies or

practices to optimize one's position within one's field. Over time, the results are cultural practices that become routine and taken for granted, thus "convincing subordinate groups that the social order in which they live is natural and inevitable" (Scott, 1990).

We argue that power is not unilateral and the subordinated may find means to overcome or at least make the most of their situation. Habitus is the reflexive context in which actors are influenced by dominant ideas while at the same time working to improve their situation through active acquisition of social capital (Bourdieu, 1977, 78-81). Habitus exists within a more broadly termed field, which is essentially produced. The structure of respective fields and the conditioned agency of habitus develop over time, but serve as the mechanisms of power maintenance (Bourdieu, 1980, 60-64). Fields are often inclusive of objective institutions: legal systems, schools, banks, and prisons, which then influence respective habitus actions. These habitus actions are deeply influenced by the structural influences inherent in these fields, which are, in turn, reflective of dominant power structures such as capitalism or religion. The commonality of action, despite the fact of individual choice, develops into a sort of homogenous set of patterned behaviors.

The homogeneity of habitus that is observed within the limits of a class of conditions of existence and social conditionings is what causes practices and works to be immediately intelligible and foreseeable, and hence taken for granted. The habitus makes questions of intentions superfluous, not only in the production but also in the deciphering of practices and works (Bourdieu, 1980, 58).

Relative homogeneity occurs as a result of social capital operating as an organizing principle, establishing expectations of required behavior within respective groups and establishing boundaries for entry. In other words, habitus is sustained by the exclusivity of social capital and the difficulty of accumulating social capital relevant to both specific habitus and field. The strength of a respective habitus is derived from the social cost to integration. These boundaries differentiating and defining a habitus is reproduced as a "unique social game" understood by those conditioned within a respective field; the unwritten rules of social etiquette and practices that individuals have internalized to the point of routine appear normal. The barriers to entry of any habitus is what validates social capital within that same habitus framework. Thus, the homogeneity of habitus within a specific field is both regulated by social capital and defines the value of a specific form of social capital. This reflexivity is ever-present in Bourdieu's theoretical framework – habitus and field and both maintained by social capital as well as define the value of specific forms of social capital.

Power in this context is not a top-down phenomenon. The multitude of individuals repeating assumed axioms accepted as truths makes it so that the structures of power that subordinate are reproduced by both the powerful and the subordinated. This runs counter to a thin theory of false consciousness that explains power and subordination as a function of ruling ideology via resignation of a respective population that simply accepts the conditions of its station.

In the context of race in a higher education environment, it will be argued that whiteness can be a cumulative form of social capital. Even non-white agents can "whiten" themselves to try and optimize their position within their fields. The idea of social capital being a cumulative asset is

accompanied by two consequences. It creates the condition for upward mobility within the field; and it also creates the necessary friction that allows for challenging habitus assumptions, because if whiteness is the organizing principle of prestige within its own particular habitus, it operates as an assumed unifying currency. However, those integrating into this habitus need to assume that whiteness is valuable; therefore, those able to engage and participate in the practice of whiteness (regardless of exogenous determination) can more readily challenge the dominant discourse because they lack the ideological presuppositions of those native to the habitus. In this sense, habitus certainly conforms behavior; but there is also space for adaptation, particularly when there are individuals who can move between respective fields. In this case, we have institutions of education and institutions of race/ethnicity that intersect with elements of class that both reinforce and challenge dominant habitus of racialized identities and behaviors in higher education. Bourdieu has a concept that addresses the habitus displacement of actors that move from one field into another as hysteresis (Hardy, 2014). This results from a person conditioned with an inappropriate habitus for a particular field, such as a long-time farmer finding himself living and adapting to an urban setting.

The conflict is an incident most would describe as a form of culture shock. It is when material realities create situations that are irreconcilable with the established premises of a respective habitus that we get a hysteresis effect that impedes the normal functioning of habitus to the point of disruption. This disruption can be anything from a simple delay to “misadaptation, as well as adaptation, revolt as well as resignation” (Bourdieu, 1977, 62). When material realities are incongruent with the dominant discourse, the necessary friction for subversive discourse is produced that carries the potential to rewrite the rules of engagement within the habitus. Why is this important, or how can we see this in reality? Financial capital, for example, facilitates upward mobility; yet access to financial capital is significantly tied to access to specific fields (institutionally operationalized as higher education, for instance). These fields carry substantive ties to structural imperatives that are historically developed and manifest in habitus patterns of conditioning. To carry the example further, the legacy of male and white exclusivity in American higher education has certainly created a habitus that privileges both.

As access to higher education gradually opened to women and people of color, so too did theoretical opportunities for access to financial capital. The habitus tied to higher education, however, continues to reflect the dominance of a single gender and racial group. More to the point, the hysteresis produced as a result of higher education access (in this case) is likely to produce social capital accumulation in one subspace that is incommunicable to another and may negatively impact potential performance between different habitus.

The implications of this are that conflict and habitus-dissonance is amplified, particularly for students of color who must adapt to a new habitus (and field of higher education) while negotiating a separation from a former habitus that remains salient. As a result, there is a distinct sense of “placelessness” as students of color commute between habitus sites; however, many strategically understand or instinctively identify forms of social and symbolic capital that are held in common between multiple fields they occupy. As such, some in the greater population may find that they are dealt with benefits in one smaller field, which do not translate to better performance in the eyes of the dominant ideology or another field in which they also participate. This will be important in discussing how whiteness as a form of capital incentivizes non-white

individuals to “whiten” themselves and essentially trade off benefits or ties in their original habitus and fields for acceptance and optimization into a larger field with a white culturally-dominant structure. This is part of what makes white privilege so powerful: a de facto habitus sustaining the expectation of accumulated prestige and capital that will unlock upward mobility; an opportunity, as such, that anyone born as “white” does not have to invest or split time and resources to align themselves with an ideology that is foreign to them. Again, white privilege is the advantage of not being hindered by race-based obstacles for success or having to concern oneself that their racial or ethnic practices put them in a disadvantage regarding upward mobility. While De La Salle did not deal with a racially heterogeneous student population, his work to integrate impoverished students into the emergent class-based social order of early capitalist France involves similar transformative goals that demand the migration from habitus and field. While race was not as much of a concern, the careful instruction of etiquette tied to an acknowledgement of class-based prestige was, as understood through a twenty-first lens, essentially De La Salle preparing his pupils in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to adapt to a field and habitus foreign to them.

Classist Elements Within the Lasallian Legacy

The etiquette of wealthy elites was integrated into the educational method De La Salle espoused. Many of the mannerisms and etiquette De La Salle encouraged were rationalized with either an implicit or explicit nod toward wealth or status superiority. Reinforcing this superiority was an underlying ideological premise that education of the poor was for the poor’s own religious salvation. Directly asserting education as a function of salvation creates, when viewed through a twenty-first century lens that often separates the sacred from the secular, an ideological undertone of class supremacy (manifested in classist actions) that will have broader cultural repercussions. The inherent bias within Lasallian teaching methods championed the “virtues” of the seventeenth century French elite, but also demanded a deeper field conversion. Instead of creating an institution of education per se, we might now say that De La Salle engineered a field that merged education with a social hierarchy that acknowledges internal inequalities, thus combining Christianity and elite norms as an obtainable form of social capital reinforcing the habitus of a constructed ideal social behavior model. From the onset, Lasallian educational opportunities reproduced in its early eighteenth century Christian context existing social hierarchies by linking these opportunities to what we now understand to be a class-biased habitus.

Being born and raised into an elite French family, De La Salle internalized social etiquette and behaviors of seventeenth century higher French social elites. It is, therefore, not odd to see *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility* so heavily preoccupied with the smallest details that would otherwise be arbitrary to anyone outside of a high French social standing, especially when viewed through a twenty-first century lens. The entanglement of Christianity with his ideas of class etiquette is also apparent,

having acquired a sense of refinement almost imperceptibly from his earliest years, he considered it to be inseparable from Christianity and was perfectly at ease in writing about it (Wright, xvi).

Additionally, De La Salle explicitly states that he believes politeness and decorum are qualities that are virtues with reference to God (3). The imbrication of class behaviors with proper Catholicism is obvious in the promoted method of De La Salle, which is then prioritized in the education of his pupils. In essence, De La Salle, as a priest of the seventeenth century, puts social etiquette in tandem with how one ought to further one's relationship to God and justifies this as integral to the education necessary for the salvation of his lower-class pupils. The identification of the social capital mechanisms necessary to achieve broader goals (salvation, material wealth) define the habitus that then forms the boundaries of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century educational field.

There are troubling implications when we, with our twenty-first century lens, consider the effects of the plying of lower-class French youth with implicit ideological assumptions that the behaviors of the wealthy elite are in some sense preferentially connected to God. Education, when practiced with proper decorum, provided moral instruction that developed spiritual integrity otherwise lacking without not only education, but also cultural transformation. Additionally, we cannot forget that De La Salle entangled the idea that one of the requisite purposes of education was for the spiritual salvation of the children his mission targeted. Education is, therefore, defined as the means of not only a better material life and a path toward salvation, but only obtainable with an internalization of social behaviors that could not be obtained without class transformation. Thus, embedding a moral institution into an educational institution would, as we now understand it from a worldview that often separates the sacred from the secular, further the field definition of Lasallian education as a class exclusive institution.

This is the process of creating habitus in real time: engineer mutually dependent institutions with knowledge that is already accepted and supported by the "common sense" of the populace. Given that most of the population was already amenable to the religious message of De La Salle and the French elite already assumed privileged positions in an established social hierarchy, encouraging a mode of thinking or habitus that intuitively operated between the two could be easily accomplished. In the eyes of the poor, the incentive structure to accept De La Salle's universal education was a means out of poverty or an opportunity of improving their positions.

For the French elite, an educated populace that supported their ideology (and deferred to their social and cultural authority) would, at minimum, be valuable for maintaining their positions and possibly tapping into the productivity benefits of a more educated workforce and advance burgeoning growth motivations in early French capitalism.

To be fair, De La Salle was highly cognizant of the context of poverty and understood that part of the reason for the cycle of poverty was a lack of skills that could be acquired through formal education in addition to positive role model development. De La Salle needed to navigate a highly stratified class system in his efforts to pioneer universal education for the poor, which was structurally encouraged by the growing dominance of capitalist rationality. Tellingly, De La Salle did suggest recruiting the poor on the principle of how education can improve their material value.

And – even at a time of absolutely hegemonic Christianity – he advised pleading their case from the secular argument – the impossibility of holding a job in the future – rather

than trying to convince the parents with religiously-based logic, in order to make them see “the harm that may be done their children by lack of instruction in those things which concern their salvation, with which the poor are often little concerned” (Hengemüle, 15).

In the minds of the poor – his target audience – a significant motivation for enrolling in one of the Christian schools was to take advantage of the promised monetary rewards of an education, thus escaping poverty. While understood as a pragmatic positive, the implication that upward mobility merely required the acquisition of skills (education) and an understanding of proper behavior (*decorum*), while essentially ignoring the structural contradictions of what might be understood today as an emerging capitalism, namely requisite inequality. Thus, for those who remained impoverished or at the lower levels of class standing, the implication was that salvation was threatened. The two, from the point of view of today’s separation of the religious and the secular, unavoidably get entangled into one system where *decorum* and upward mobility advance together.

Interestingly, this modern day interpretation suggests that to a large extent De La Salle is not just pioneering universal education, but also assisting with the creation of a new working class and divisions of labor to influence social organization in a way that was not previously apparent (or at least, ubiquitous). In creating a new class of individuals with a potential for upward mobility, contingent on formal education and an understanding of proper *decorum*, De La Salle promoted the latent development of a new *habitus*. For those unfortunately born below this new class, education likely held a monopoly over the opportunity for upward integration. In the early Lasallian tradition, this opportunity required not only obtaining knowledge that would be taught within the educational setting, but the drilling of the *decorum* which would be expected of anyone who would want to be accepted into this proto-middle class.

But this new status [upward mobility], Huppert adds, demanded conformity to the traditional social codes of the upper classes and could easily be lost by those who did not know the rules of refinement. This attention to the traditional practices of *decorum* and civility to maintain social rank could have been an important reason for the continuing popularity of *Les Règles de la Bienséance* [Rules of Christian Decorum], which might, in fact, have become the *vade mecum* of the upwardly mobile (Wright, xxi).

The “rules of refinement” are subject to the class into which one wishes to integrate. Essentially, De La Salle’s vision and approach to education in the schools provided social capital in the sense that it expanded the opportunity for interaction across class lines while also investing in symbolic capital development through the explicit *decorum* presented. Consequently, *habitus* forms barriers to upward class mobility and practices in common between groups of people. Therefore, the cultural education found in *The Rules Christian Decorum and Civility* would become the *vade mecum* in the eighteenth century for the upwardly mobile, due to its constant references to hierarchy, station, etiquette, and educational means for understanding socially expected behavior conducive to gaining prestige with people of a higher social rank. A substantial portion of *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility* is dedicated, unsurprisingly given the context in which it was written, to the idea of class subordination when people of lower rank interact with those of a higher social standing. Some of De La Salle’s teachings on *decorum* advised going as far as saying two people of different rank cannot have a friendship (De La Salle, 34) and that it would

displease God to see a person spending money on items that were “above one’s station” (De La Salle, 49).

The habitus created by early Lasallian pedagogy implied that social mobility was limited for most people. On the other hand, if you were one of the few with the ability to integrate upwardly, knowing how others (particularly your social betters) expected you to act, it would be made much easier to develop positive social capital. But also, in the case of the elite, an etiquette with clearly defined class structures and behavior would be highly beneficial in maintaining your own standing (and in a public and conspicuous way). This etiquette also allowed for discernible differentiation between the newly upwardly mobile class and classes below them who would not have been disciplined in elite behavioral expectations. This creates not only a downward pressure to conform to hierarchy but a bottom up pressure by creating inter- and intra-class tension through the establishment of differential opportunities through social and cultural metamorphoses. This bottom-up form of power conditioning can seem counter intuitive; but as Foucault simply states: “The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle” (98). In the long run, populations form a habitus within specific fields that develop a behavioral equilibrium and dominate social action strategies.

A formed habitus would generate predispositions and practices that would be justified and understood by the population as socially necessary or urgent, in the same way that Elinor Ostrom (2015) observed that a population in the face of scarcity formed unique rules to govern common resource pools and developed institutions of surveillance. In these common resource pools the accountability of policing and monitoring behaviors was shared by multiple democratic or micro-institutions as well as the personal responsibility of the individual. Whether it is Japanese wheat harvesting villages or the locally monitored Spanish irrigation systems used by *hereters* cited by Ostrom, common resource pools maintained high levels of adherence and policing done by local communities: “. . . it is not necessary for the regulation of the commons to be imposed coercively from the outside” (McKean quoted in Ostrom, 69). This development of bottom-up power allows for the establishment of community level equilibriums to maintain order and social cohesion without constant regulation from agents outside the community. Habitus formed under these conditions are difficult to break because they have more unique and local barriers to exit and entry. To French elites in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, support for De La Salle’s work would have been desirable because it encouraged a culture supporting either their particular class interests or at the least acquiescence to their authoritative position.

Many of these same institutional characteristics are still found in the promised transformative effects of contemporary universities. Promoted as facilitators of economic opportunity (or upward mobility), institutions of higher education are also mechanisms for granting social prestige and providing a means to acquire conspicuous financial capital. In these ways, higher education holds a cultural monopoly over broad provisional access to upward socioeconomic integration. As the gendered, class-based, and racialized exclusivity of higher education waned (at least legally) in the twentieth century, the field of higher education would sustain habitus norms associated with the establishment of “correct behavior” regarding upward mobility. The following section examines the impact of this sustained habitus on racial identity in the contemporary era.

Non-White Adaptation to White Incentive Structures

De La Salle lived in a time when France was relatively racially homogenous, at least with regards to maintaining opportunity divisions between an overwhelmingly white French populace and people of color (largely in socially subservient or enslaved roles). Thus, issues of racial integration in universal education in seventeenth and early eighteenth century France were either substantially limited or non-existent.

However, the legacies of racialized slavery, racial and ethnic discrimination, subsequent racialized segregation, and exclusive racialized opportunities (notably in higher education) create a requisite demand to address race, regardless of the removal of those legal barriers to equal participation. The use of race as a means to maintain control over material resources, mobilize and control labor (both wage and enslaved labor), as well as protect existing access to wealth and capital opportunities has defined the American historical experience (Carlson and Roberts, 2006; Oliver and Shapiro, 2013) and emerged as a legacy of colonial logics of racialized power and exclusive opportunity structures (Glenn, 2015; Sanyal, 2014). This structural synthesis of race and class formation means that the legacy of class imbrication in higher education will also ultimately integrate the racial elements that define broader segregated social contexts.

The contemporary need to include race as a central point of Lasallian discourse is due to the fact that we operate on a principle of universal education, but do so in the context of steep racially segmented and segregated populations. This has huge implications for field and habitus development in that racial, in addition to class, factors also have implications for the distribution of educational resources. Despite the removal of racial exclusivity from the legal practice of higher education, the field conditions and habitus practices defined by the long history of white exclusivity were able to retain many (if not all) of their established criteria. Furthermore, universities have a capacity to act as the provider of conspicuous goods (i.e., academic degrees) that act in part as symbolic gate keepers of higher social status. Contemporary institutions of higher education, in this sense, serve as arbiters of a valuable form of symbolic capital.

Normally the point of a conspicuous good is to imply privileged access to a certain lifestyle or highlight social value tied to material conditions. It signals an ability to overcome certain barriers to obtain a privileged social good. In this case, the contemporary college or university does two things: it enables access to opportunities necessary for the acquisition of a particular lifestyle and it is, in and of itself, a conspicuous commodity that signals status. So not only does higher education present itself as a vehicle to obtain further prestige in the future, it is itself a prestige signaling institution. Higher education is a field that provides a convergence point for prestige and prestige seekers. One of the primary pragmatic functions of a university is to develop a popular homogeneity in regards to what is socially prestigious at a particular time and place. What makes an educational institution valuable and why people take on large financial costs to attend a high-ranked college (or a college, at all) is due to the promise of future returns that will overcome the initial cost outlays. While income may be the first idea people associate with prestige, some studies have concluded that education and prestige provide a stronger correlation (Weiss and Fershtman, 1998). Upward mobility in a capitalist society is not exclusively dependent on income, but also on the ability to mobilize social capital in the form of social

network integration. Further, vocational prestige enhances future income opportunities that are facilitated through skills obtained in higher educational institutions.

Claiming that people are chasing prestige for the sake of itself is untenable. With this in mind the next step is to ask what exactly is “prestige” in this case and how might it be racially contingent? More specifically, what does prestige look like for the non-white student seeking upward mobility? We argue that this pursuit of upward mobility cannot be divorced from the field conditions and habitus established in higher education institutions. More to the point, it is possible to discern habitus adaptation strategies utilized by non-white students to integrate into higher education fields. The prestige provided by a university degree is a means to further socio-economic mobility; however, the context of obtaining that degree creates differential strategic costs for students of color.

The nexus of race and labor commonly carries with it a particular set of strategies in common between non-white individuals of various ethnicities and races, specifically, the tactic of “whitening” oneself to adapt to expectations of employers (Gerdeman). This includes tactics such as altering names, highlighting hobbies that make them seem more in line with the perceived practices of an overwhelmingly white managerial class, or the outright hiding of associations with racial clubs or programs that are specifically oriented toward non-white populations. Multiple studies have established a clear penalty paid by non-white job applicants in relation to their white peers (Bertrand and Mullainathan). Additionally, Kang et al. (2016) found that it was not uncommon for (non-white) students to consciously tailor their names on resumes at the suggestion of career services advisors at their respective colleges. One of the main reasons for “whitening” one’s resume by omitting experiences that would signal minority status or presenting interests that could be understood as “emphasizing experiences that signaled whiteness or assimilation into ‘white culture’” (12).

Whiteness appears to have a value that is associated with prestige or at the minimum gives one access to social capital in professional environments. There is an evidenced benefit to an ability to conform to habitus practices associated with whiteness, and it makes pragmatic sense that minority students and jobseekers who whiten their presentation of self would find that their “blending” into white-dominated environments elicits a net-positive despite the cost of sacrificing a measure of their ethnic identity. Again, the imbrication of wealth with whiteness is well established; therefore, any habitus tied to material or wealth opportunities must incorporate a semblance of the racialization of social and financial capital.

Homogenization is facilitated when systemic pressures within a particular field or multiple interacting fields incentivize individuals to conform to a majority identity for specific participatory benefits or to avoid penalization as something “other” than the norm. Whiteness becomes a habitus disposition for members who operate within a value-laden field and, as such, it is a mechanism that creates barriers to entry and exit. Whitening oneself does not automatically confer advantages to an individual, but rather it removes or weakens barriers to entry and racially related difficulties in goal attainment. Accepting whiteness as a social value reduces the hysteresis felt by students of color, because to operate within the bounds of the expectations and rules of the fields one is encouraged to accept the homogenizing tendencies of whiteness. The university directly and indirectly conforms to these pressures and reproduces them as a function

of social capital endowment based on its status as an arbiter of a conspicuous commodity. The college or university vets individuals to create exclusivity within the higher education field as well as promoting distinction between institutions as a way to maintain competition in attracting more students.

If enabling upward mobility is a marketable feature of the university and if prestige is tied to whiteness (which in turn is a highly valued form of capital for job allocation), the university to some degree reproduces the socially accepted valuation of whiteness to enhance its own prestige for sustaining its value as a provider of a competitive conspicuous commodity tied to upward mobility. Again, despite the elimination of white exclusivity in higher education admissions, empirical data related to affirmative action efficacy highlights not only a failure to achieve fair minority representation at prestigious universities, but a regression (Ashkenas et al.).

Representation has improved at some less elite institutions; but if anything, that should confirm that universities are prestige magnets that remain tied to the reproduction of whiteness as capital in admissions and assumed fit in terms of ability to prepare for post-undergraduate life. The fact is to enter prestige involves a bit of a loop. If you want to increase your access to prestige, have access to capital, especially whiteness; and if you want to gain more whiteness, you have to expose yourself to more prestige. Expressing it this way is somewhat of a simplification of a more complex dynamic, but not one that is misleading. The fact remains that prestige and whiteness still operate as social values that are highly competitive and sought after as well as barriers to entry for upward mobility. Being without one significantly increases the difficulty for people of color to pursue courses of action that would be aligned with chasing prestige and upper-class values.

The following section examines the legacy of racial and class intersections, while highlighting the difficulties in alleviating racially prejudiced biases within multiple fields, and informing habitus conditions that the modern Lasallian mission must counter in order to maintain consistency with practiced core principles.

Critical Joint Discussion on Class and Race

To fully grasp how fields related to class and race intersect and impact the contemporary university, it is important to take an historical perspective to add substance to the theories of homogeneity and white capital. Particularly, the focus will be how institutional favoritism of whiteness has created its own habitus regarding practices and strategies to which non-white students must adapt. The intersection between race and class can be best observed by how agents make choices to adjust to the demands of their respective fields. The difference in tactics and their underlying motives for tactical differences toward the same general goal (prestige) can elucidate the intersection between the two. Because some tactics like “whitening” oneself only make sense in the context of sought-after normative values such as class status, they are in some ways incentivizing persons to adopt normative values of whiteness in order to achieve better class status or socio-economic improvement. One instance of the intersect between race and class in the twenty-first century as well as in the late twentieth century is racial self-selection. Observing how and why some choose to racially self-select will demonstrate advantages or

circumstantial advantages in the pursuit of prestige, along with the issue of what will be called “membership dues” for whiteness.

Self-selection of race is commonly discussed in multiple contexts: individuals who are biracial or white-passing choosing to identify as a minority for affirmative action benefits but choosing to use their white-passing status in other contexts, such as the Malone brothers, who were white yet used dubious evidence of a African ancestor to claim access to affirmative action policies of the Boston Fire Department (New York Times, 1988), or in cases mentioned earlier where students and job seekers whiten themselves.

In some cases, it has been documented that as African-Americans rise to middle-income status, others’ perception of them has less to do with racial features, as compared to when African-Americans are lower-income (Weeks and Lupfer, 2004). This could be interpreted in several ways. Perhaps as non-whites progress socio-economically, their practices of auto-whitening are more successful or there are implicit biases that associate being African-American with lower-income status, or any fluid combination of the two. The combination suggests that the more one breaks the mold of a racial stereotype and its associated class expectations, the more inclined others are to accept them into a different racial category or feel indifferent to their racial category. Indifference to a non-white person’s racial category is equivalent to white-passing⁷ in the sense that those professionally relevant to the agent are not labeled with the racial expectations of their respective race.

This intersection of race and class produces bidirectional pressure. On the one hand, we have non-whites who are whitening themselves as a means to meet social expectations that strategically align themselves with expectations of prestige, while on the other hand there are those who are either white, or have successfully whitened themselves, who employ whiteness as a social capital barrier for entry to those socio-economically below them.

Our findings indicate that some portion of Americans who experience an increase in their social position are “whitened” as a result of this mobility, and similarly, some portion of those who experience a decrease in their social position are “darkened” (Saperstein and Penner, 678).

Racial mobility in class systems implies that in the long run racial inequality reaches some level of equilibrium if non-white individuals have a method for upward mobility without sacrificing their foundational cultural and subjective identities. However, this is likely not the case, because of the incentive structures in place that treat whiteness as having a significant use-value. In this case, white passing, non-white individuals have obtained something to be protected. The item of value is the whiteness they use as a form of credibility due to the historical link between whiteness and economic opportunity in American history. We can take Irish, Italian, or eastern Europeans as examples of groups who were not originally given de-facto white status privilege (despite being thought of as white or as lesser white) in the United States of America and had to fight to be recognized as counter-parts to their already highly established Anglo peers (Barrett & Roediger, 2008). Roediger documents how in the late post-Civil War era the Irish were met with hostility from nativists and in popular thought were to some extent seen interchangeable with blacks (as far as their labor value and living conditions were concerned). As a means to gain

access to political and economic opportunities, Irish immigrants sought to adopt a concept of whiteness not found in Ireland to differentiate themselves from blacks, but also to counter the prejudice they faced within their new American home by rallying themselves as white first, Irish second. “Had the Irish tried to assert a right to work because they were Irish, rather than because they were white, they would have provoked a fierce backlash from native-born artisans” (Roediger, 148). Whiteness is not something that you either have or do not have. Whiteness was constructed in such a way that it functions as a condition of cumulative value. Obviously, the Irish were white in the traditional sense of being lighter skinned; but they and other European immigrants at the time were encouraged to conform to a discourse of whiteness to make themselves seem to have more in common with their established European counterparts in America than with their other ethnic competitors with whom they had more in common regarding their labor activities and living conditions.

To various extents, non-whites who accumulate whiteness would be keen to defend their capital gain and reinforce the habitus imbrication of race and economic opportunity as they are seeing returns on investment in the form of social mobility. That is why the historical legacy of legitimated racial segregation remains so determinant of social mobility – the sustained habitus of racialized social capital linked to economic success stratifies non-whites and is historically sustained by constantly redefining white in opposition to an “other.” In the case of race mattering less as class mobility is achieved by non-white persons, it may seem this way only because non-whites who have taken advantage of whitening themselves are likely the ones who had the ability or opportunity to do so. Rich documented the case of Eric Longmire, noticing that whiteness to some degree comes with “membership dues.” Longmire was, himself, biracial who self-selected as white for his job but realized after a legal issue occurred that this self-selection was also a forfeiture of his non-white protections.

These historical legacies continue to influence social systems that have moved beyond white racial exclusivity (again, at least in a legal sense) and allow for various levels of racial fluidity on class mobility itself, specifically in a system of education where prestige is both a product and a normative value of educational training. As much as a college education acts as a catapult for upward social mobility it also acts as a barrier due to its dependency on its role as a bestower of social capital in the form of prestige. Because an institution can only be prestigious if it safeguards its social status and internalizes the dominant normative values associated with success, the college or university has a vested latent interest in aligning itself with a habitus of prestige.

In other words, higher education plays an important function in perpetuating the socio-economic differentiation and classism between non-whites and whites. It should not be a controversial statement to claim that historically there is a precedent of whiteness as a restricting factor of admission within the university, especially for professional and graduate levels of education, to the extent that the United States Commission on Civil Rights in 1977 reported,

In 1948, one-third of the approved medical schools had official policies of denying black applicants admission solely on the basis of race. Even after official policies of racial exclusion were abandoned, the number of black medical students remained small (10).

While legal discrimination is limited today, this historical precedent reinforces the entanglement of whiteness and prestige and informs a habitus assumption that success and whiteness are necessary conditions for mobility via the educational system by essentially homogenizing expectations within a field and amplifying the hysteresis for those that do not fit the mold. Indeed, the very demographic realities of many higher education institutions in the United States of America confirm the habitus beliefs of many who assume whiteness and high levels of achievement are nearly implicit. In turn, educational institutions are systemically incentivized to conform because of various vocationally linked incentives such as ranking systems tied to future career earnings, returns on investment, and other valuable recruitment tools.

There is a negative feedback loop of whiteness necessary for increasing one's capacity to act white, and this is cumulative in the sense that every marginal gain in whiteness is built on whiteness previously acquired. Essentially, in order to continually accumulate greater recognition of whiteness the agent requires some understanding or acknowledgement of whiteness from the beginning. This is intuitive to understand if we consider adapting to a habitus as a learning process. Habitus adaptation requires an understanding of the rules, an investment in adhering to those basic rules, and the opportunity to actually integrate into the broader social context structured by a respective habitus. If one is able to integrate, the benefits of habitus conformity requires sustained and deepening adherence to relevant established culture. Assimilation is not an overnight process. Saperstein and Pinner note,

For example, it is possible that one of the reasons the racial hierarchy in the United States has remained relatively stable over time is that upward mobility gets redefined: white people appear to be more successful in part because successful people become white, through either self-identification, external classification, or both (685).

Because non-whites have historically suffered with structural forms of racism that limited their capacity to be upwardly mobile, the educational discrimination against them has solidified a habitus where whiteness and its associations have a priority on social mobility and occupying higher-class spaces. The monopolization of whiteness affords privileged access to high social standing but also the security of maintaining discursive primacy through the consequent determination of the value of non-whiteness:

The second irony, related to the first, is that the diversity rationale confers on white people and predominantly white institutions the power to determine the value of non-whiteness. Because non-whiteness is valued in terms of what it adds to white people's experiences or endeavors, white people determine what non-whiteness is worth (Leong, 2171).

The advantage of having a monopoly on prestige is that it can be institutionally protected so that whiteness creates an inertia that is incredibly difficult to counter and, in effect, generates what are defined as acceptable non-white behaviors. The implication of which is, of course, that the path of greatest success for non-white students remains contingent on their ability to conform to a white cultural context. Much like poor elementary school students in De La Salle's time, the implication remains that maintaining cultural and social behaviors that are outside of this

acceptable context cannot achieve the capital necessary to attain the upward social mobility promised by higher education.

Uprooting this bias in higher education institutions would provide a major help to non-white individuals, but also would help break the equilibrium whiteness has built for itself and thus enable broader access to the ease of opportunity access afforded by white privilege. Race and class are intimately related and discussing how to mitigate the negative effects of one without a careful consideration of the other is a limited conversation.

The final section of this paper examines the potential for a refocusing of the Lasallian mission to the modern imbricated realities of race and class and what a new habitus sensitive to both means for twenty-first century Lasallian Core Principles.

Lasallians in the Twenty-First Century

The Lasallian Core Principles that recognize the urgency for a response to this entanglement of race and class are the values of respect for all persons, quality education, concern for the poor and social justice, and especially inclusive community. It is difficult to argue that the latter two are not the two most important values in this case. Because the issue is entirely systemic and has a rooted legacy that predates Lasallian universities and is present in other institutions that function adjacent to the university, Lasallians alone cannot resolve the issue. However, just because De La Salle could not provide universal education to the entire world did not mean his efforts were pointless. Likewise, where Lasallians can provide essential leadership is by providing a platform that increases awareness of the discourse necessary to challenge the habitus of privilege that has made itself so prominent in areas from education to politics.

The imbrication of vocational value (or return on investment) in the field of higher education facilitates the reproduction and internalization of these biases that continue to define successful labor market integration. Despite the Lasallian mission of universal education being effectively realized in the twenty-first century, the question is how does a modern institution grounded in the Lasallian mission navigate a field where whiteness as capital influences accessibility to a universally acceptable standard of education? Basic literacy skills will always be important; but in an economy that is increasingly tending toward hyper-specialization, it is insufficient by itself for changing the socioeconomic realities of inequality in a positive way.

An institution grounded in the Lasallian mission with a focus on racial social justice will require more than just action at the university level; it will require systemic intervention at all levels of education. It is imperative to recognize that the university level of education is still the important institution in solidifying one's prestige and thus social capital development; but the potential benefits nonwhite students can realize at the university level will be dependent on their prior educational history. Therefore, college readiness for nonwhite students should be a Lasallian focus. Lasallians have the advantage of historically-established school and educational credibility at all levels; and with that advantage, it should be easier for Lasallians to pioneer a redefining of prestige acquisition. The idea is to assist the integration of nonwhite students into labor force employment traditionally restricted by sustained structures of privilege. Part of the strategy would be to alter the habitus of higher education, and in our case Lasallian higher

education, by emphasizing the fact that nonwhite students are capable of acquiring requisite social capital and prestige without sacrificing their identity or being penalized for not necessarily conforming to the cultural habitus of higher education.

Single blanket policies such as affirmative action policies are insufficient to elicit real change. What needs to be accomplished is a restructuring of the discursive environment that informs the value systems that guide institutions of higher education. In *Fisher vs. University of Texas at Austin*, US Supreme Court Justice Kennedy cited Justice Powell who concluded that affirmative action policies with the intent of racial remediation cannot be part of the mission of the university:

Redressing past discrimination could not serve as a compelling interest, because a university's "broad mission [of] education" is incompatible with making the "judicial, legislative, or administrative findings of constitutional or statutory violations" necessary to justify remedial racial classification (6).

Within the scope of affirmative action, as is legally allowed, the purpose is not to achieve a remediation of past wrongs, but to provide nominal diversity into a college. What defines an adequate level of diversity and how this measurement is derived is to a large degree left to the discretion of the college. To reiterate Nancy Leong's earlier quote: this is another form of white privilege in deciding the value of non-whiteness and selecting what kind of non-white features best compliment the current habitus.

Leong distinguishes between thick and thin versions of diversity, with the latter more preoccupied with sheer numbers integrated with no regard for on-campus integration. In other words, the thin versions of diversity of education value non-whiteness for the social recognition or gratification it gives along with a seeming attempt to tackle social injustices, but never asks whether it is creating a selection based on a bias that excludes non-white students who may be less able to conform to the "habitus of higher educational whiteness." What compliments "the current habitus best" is not necessarily selecting minority students who embody habitus practices from their respective environment (often much different than students most highly sought after in higher education) but choosing students who have already been vetted via multiple levels of education, standardized testing, and other myriad admission evaluation criteria (essay construction, extracurricular promotion, etc.). Thus, non-white students sought after by a prestigious institution are likely already comfortably adapted to the habitus of the university, while those less familiar or able to integrate relevant habitus norms, are not. As a result, diversity becomes more of a game of numbers and less an effort to provide actually existing access to the social capital necessary to enhance labor market integration – not to mention personal intellectual growth. While applying this thin version of diversity does have the potential to increase institutional diversity, it would pale in comparison to a thick version that paid more respect to (and placed higher value on) the backgrounds of the persons themselves, rather than just their stated racial identifications combined with their capacity to meet habitus expectations during the admissions process.

Pushing for a race conscious discourse at the university level in the hopes of gaining support from other institutions, and academics who are already aware and supportive, would be an

important first step for such an approach in Lasallian institutions. Also helpful would be an acknowledgement that the university does not operate at the start of prestige safeguarding. People are vetted and differentiated by the college admission process based on their earlier education and life experiences. It is at the primary and secondary level of education that Lasallian institutions can possibly make the largest impact for students' college careers (and ability to accumulate prestige) by arming their less privileged students with the knowledge and skills to progress upwards by lowering the barriers to entry into quality universities and colleges. At the same time, it would be necessary to keep in mind the goal of maintaining for them a networked sense of community as a support system. The benefits of colleges and universities can only be fully realized by students who are prepared to take advantage of the opportunities available.

Essentially it is insufficient to focus on the university alone and forget the younger formative years of education, as if four years in university can undo eighteen years of poor preparation (and this is not counting the ones who did not make it to university on account of poor preparation). Remediation is not the goal, because remediation implies something early on went astray and requires correction. Instead the goal is to streamline the process and entry into higher education for students by ensuring things went right from the beginning. And the cumulative gains of a quality education can be realized when it matters most (at the level of university). The university remains a powerful institution for upward mobility for nonwhite students, but it will be the preliminary work at the earlier stages that will make it possible for schools and professional networks, such as the Lasallian educational network, to propel nonwhite students forward rather than remediate.

What may be a possible counter to white dominated prestige in the long run is to gradually endorse non-white professional communities to establish a subspace where non-white individuals can network to achieve social mobility without having to entirely resort to strategies of investing entirely into whiteness. While that surely does not entirely fix the issue, it could provide substantial mitigation of the problem. The point is to sustain a culture that combats the implicit idea that whiteness and prestige are two sides of the same coin.

What makes Lasallian education unique is its mission-based foundation and its organizational structure. It is one of the only private educational networks of institutions established at nearly all levels of education with strong primary, secondary, and tertiary roots. Effectively already embodying the potential to act as one large educational community, its institutions have the capacity to network with one another and organize at every level of education to at least foster this hypothetical professional network and create a space for positive social capital accumulation such that it can occur for students of color. Strategic attention to resolving the habitus disconnects for students of color fits comfortably within the Lasallian value of inclusive community and is clearly social justice oriented. While the idea of non-white professional networks is not novel, endorsing the idea at an institutional level with the amount of support that Lasallian schools can give would be of substantial benefit. Because Lasallians have a presence at all levels of education, it would be easier to network non-white younger students with professional role models with whom they can identify, but also to break molds or social expectations these students have of themselves. This combination of selection bias recognition on the part of the institution, in both admissions and expectations in campus settings and

mentoring at earlier stages of the educational process, has the potential to affect a recognition that habitus practices in higher education are distinctly privileged toward white students and non-white students best able to incorporate those norms.

Addressing centuries of racialized economic field and habitus construction is clearly beyond the scale of Lasallian institutional scope; however, it must be recognized that Lasallian schools with their respective core principles--even while recognizing those five principles are but three decades old and quite USA-centric--offer a distinct opportunity to address and mitigate cultural and power-laden legacies that continue to establish barriers for students of color. The onus is ethically upon Lasallian institutions to discuss and debate these intersecting issues of class, race, and their roles as facilitators of the highest quality education for all students without demanding subjective sacrifice from some while allowing others (indeed, the majority) to achieve their goals without barriers or sacrifices. The intersect between class and race, while not unique to the United States of America, is particularly salient in USA politics and history. We are a nation with a sustained history of racial discrimination, segregation, and constructed opportunities based on whiteness. However, the United States is also a nation with a fundamental classical liberal ideology that preaches egalitarian principles. To that end, class and race will have to be understood differently in American contexts because, economically, race for Americans is every bit a part of capitalism as accompanying inequality and classism.

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Endnotes

1. Justin Peralta, who graduated from Manhattan College with a bachelor's degree in philosophy and economics, is currently attending Brooklyn Law School.
2. Cory Blad, who is a professor and chair of sociology at Manhattan College, earned his doctorate in sociology from the University of Tennessee.
3. The Five Lasallian Core Principles are Faith in the Presence of God, Concern for the Poor and Social Justice, Respect for All Persons, Quality Education, and Inclusive Community.
4. For a discussion of these principles, please see: "The Five Lasallian Core Principles of Lasallian Schools: Their Origins, Integration with Catholic Identity, and Resonance Today" in *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 10, no. 1 (2019).

5. The concept of “whiteness” is defined broadly in this essay as more of an identity and cultural concept, rather than simply being a physical manifestation of a racial category. As such, we understand racial categorization to be a cultural practice in line with constructionist arguments that define race as identity construction and significantly influenced by subjective and structural pressures and conditions (e.g., Omi and Winant, 2014; Frankenburg, 1993; Bell, 1995).

6. Although this journal usually requires that all citations use the Chicago Manual of Style (CMS) format, an exception has been made in this issue to allow citations to be made using the American Psychological Association (APA) format.

7. This is also the result of the power-laden context of race in American society. The hegemonic status of whiteness is the product of historical intent, but as discussed in previous sections, is sustained through the imbrication of racial benefits or the lack of barriers to white individuals as opposed to people of color. As such, the equivalence of indifference and “white passing” is a practical determination.