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Christina Collins. *"Ethnically Qualified": Race, Merit, and the Selection of Urban Teachers, 1920-1980.* New York: Teachers College Press, 2011. 264 pp. $43.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8077-5163-3.

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Something Old, Something New: Lessons from the Past about Diversifying the Urban Teaching Force of the United States

At the time of this writing, university students across the United States are heading back to school to begin the fall semester. In colleges of education across the nation, students are beginning coursework in introduction to education or introduction to methods. Part and parcel of the beginning of almost all of those courses is some sort of discussion or activity that problematizes the ethnic demographics of teachers in the contemporary United States. There is a good reason for these discussions: according to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2007 to 2008 the nation's teaching force was 83 percent white, a problem considering the nation as a whole is only 72.3 percent white.[1] This is a problem both urban and rural; in rural Wyoming, for example, where the two largest minority groups are Hispanic (8.9 percent) and American Indian (2.4 percent), those populations only comprise 2.9 percent and almost 0 percent of the teaching force, respectively. In New York State, home to many large urban centers, the number of Hispanic teachers (17.6 percent of the total population) and African American teachers (15.9 percent of the total population) is also low: 6.1 percent and 6.3 percent of the overall teaching force, respectively.[2] Clearly diversifying the nation's teaching force is and must be a critical component of the curriculum of colleges of education across the nation. Indeed, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education has built such an effort into its core standards; the "target" level of assessment in this area posits that colleges must provide opportunities for pre-service teacher candidates to "engage in professional education experiences in conventional and distance learning programs with candidates from the broad range of diverse groups. The active participation of candidates from diverse cultures and with different experiences is solicited, valued, and promoted in classes, field experiences, and clinical practice. Candidates reflect on and analyze these experiences in ways that enhance their development and growth as professionals."[3]

What all of this conversation regarding diversifying the nation's teaching force lacks is historical context: when have boards and other administrators tried this before, how did administrators try it, and how successful were the results? Christina Collins attempts to fill in some of these gaps in *"Ethnically Qualified."* Unlike most of the contemporary research on the (lack of) diversity in the nation's teaching force and its colleges of education, Collins takes researchers to the archives of the New York City Board of Education, Hunter College, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture to address the gaps. Collins retains an apt, historically neutral voice in presenting the story of how the New York City Board of Education, via its board of examiners, among other means, selected its teachers throughout the bulk of the twentieth century, developed its teaching examinations, and established its links to the city's teacher's college system.

Chapter 1, the introduction, provides the necessary background to understand the issues discussed in later chapters, including an introduction to the controversial and problematic board of examiners, the gatekeepers to teacher certification for generations. It presents an overview of the three debates surrounding teacher selection that are explored at length throughout the rest of the book. Firstly, because discrimination was taking place at every level of teacher selection and promotion, "by the end of the long bureaucratic process of teacher selection in New York City," there existed "extraordinarily low proportions of minority educators," which, in turn, brought "much criticism in the 1960s and 1970s." Secondly, teaching represented a "key link in the chain of racial and eth-

nic succession in urban political power"; indeed, while discrimination existed much more strongly in the private sector, minority populations were able to use teaching as an entree to the middle class (p. 5). Thirdly, there existed (indeed, still exists) "deep disagreements in New York and elsewhere over what a 'qualified teacher' for a city classroom should look like … to determine what good urban teachers needed to know and do." Specifically, it was (and is) hotly debated "whether teacher characteristics such as race, gender, and ethnicity shaped their effectiveness" (p. 6).

In exploring these three debates, the following five chapters follow a similar pattern: each identifies a different aspect of the selection and career development of teachers in New York City through a chronological lens. Each chapter provides a brief overview of the topic before 1930, in the 1930s and 1940s, in the 1950s and 1960s, and in the 1960s and 1970s. Some chapters extend the analysis into the 1970s and 1980s, as well. Chapter 2, "The Whole School-Accrediting Road," explores the teacher education path in New York City, from high schools through colleges of teacher education. Collins examines how demographics of universities and colleges of education shifted over time, which, theoretically, should have paved the way for a more diverse teaching force in the city.

How the gains identified in chapter 2 are undone is the premise of chapter 3, "'Ethnically Qualified': Recruiting New York City Teachers." This chapter explores how discrimination–specifically antiblack and anti-Jewish discrimination–negatively affected teachers on permanent contract status and the evolving battles with the UFT, the group that had beaten both the teacher's union and the National Education Association to become the sole legal representative of teachers in collective bargaining. It provides the beginnings of an interesting argument about how minority teachers were disproportionately kept on a temporary contract basis rather than granted legitimized status as full-time employees.

Chapter 4 moves from recruitment of teachers to methods of certification. "The 'Merit System': Exams and Alternatives for Licensing New York City Teachers" lays the groundwork for a critical analysis of the use of standardized examinations, both oral and written, as a tool for exclusion of minority teachers. Not only are local examinations, and the board of examiners, historically analyzed in a critical light, but the chapter also briefly explores the creation of the National Teaching Exam. First administered in 1940, the exam would pave the way for today's series of Praxis I and II exams, created by the Educational Testing Service and administered to teacher candidates nationwide.

Chapter 5 identifies what happened to those teachers who managed to survive the process and become certified to teach in the city. "'A Political Headache': The Hiring and Placement of New York City Teachers" looks at the unfortunate pattern of placing minority teachers in schools with students of similar ethnic or racial backgrounds–which, all too often, were the poorest performing schools in the city, referred to as "difficult schools" (p. 116). This chapter identifies efforts to adopt affirmative action programs to recruit and retain more minority teachers. Collins goes on to discuss the battle between the school board, which, by the 1970s, advocated affirmative action and the placement of teachers in schools based, in part, on their ethnicity, and the UFT, which supports giving voice to teachers with seniority on matters of school placement and advocates community control of staffing.

Beyond the battles of teacher placement are issues of tenure, promotion, and retention. Chapter 6, "'Up the Ladder through the System': Advancing and Ending Teaching Careers in New York City," explores how a pattern of bias and discrimination infused and ultimately undermined the system of tenure and promotion, particularly those of the promotion examinations that existed in New York City. It also discusses the development of alternatives to dismissal, such as involuntary transfer and the battles between such efforts and proponents of community control. Those debates, framed in arguments such as embedded racism in teacher examinations and their lack of relevancy, culminated in the New York teacher's strike of 1968–a movement triggered by the involuntary transfer of teachers.

The all-too-short (four pages) "Epilogue: Urban Teacher Diversity in the Twenty-First Century" is a significant miss in the work. In theory, it connects the historical developments depicted throughout the book to current teacher demographics. However, it also explores a wide swath of issues–praxis tests, affirmative action efforts, and the like–in far too brief format, devoting a paragraph or two to links that warrant far further exploration. The book, as a whole, would have benefited from a more detailed linkage between current practices under debate and their origins and development.

Other than the epilogue, the book, as a whole, stands up well as a supplement to (although not alongside) the canon of literature surrounding New York City schools, such as Diane Ravitch's *The Great School Wars: A History*

of the New York City Public Schools (2000) and studies in urban education, such as David Tyack's *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (1974), both of which are frequently cited in Collins's book. Strengths of the study include the aforementioned neutrality of tone. Each section of each chapter presents the material covered in the section and then follows it up with a section criticizing that approach. The book, as a whole, is well organized; the previously noted pattern of data presentation makes for a smooth flow of information throughout. Methodologically, Collins taps into an exhaustive amount of primary archival data, as well as a variety of secondary sources.

However, also from a historical methods point of view, *"Ethnically Qualified"* has two weaknesses. Firstly, by choosing a near-entirely archival approach to the material, Collins lacks consistent use of first person accounts throughout the study. There is an occasional story interwoven, such as that of Bel Kaufman, author of *Up the Down Staircase* (1965), found in the fourth chapter. Kaufman recounts failing her teacher's exam due to what the board of examiners believed was a misinterpretation of an Edna St. Vincent Millay poem. Incensed, Kaufman collected evidence proving her interpretation valid–including (in a scene reminiscent of an old Rodney Dangerfield film) a lengthy letter from the poet explaining that Kaufman's interpretation was exactly what she intended–but the board refused to overturn its previous decision. This account was found in an article written by Kaufman; surely there exist dozens, if not hundreds, of accounts of teachers wrongfully denied certification that, had Collins chosen a more mixed methods approach to the work, would have made it eminently more readable.

Secondly, Collins chose to limit her approach to strictly examining the teaching force of New York City. While admirable in organization and research, there is no attempt to contextualize the arguments in larger discourses. For example, in chapter 5, Collins discusses the beginnings of affirmative action programs as an attempt to diversify the teaching force in New York City; however, other than two sentences explaining that the efforts were grounded in the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) decision and the activism of the NAACP, no greater explanation is provided. The reader is left wondering whether such affirmative action programs were taking place elsewhere, and, if so, were they longer lasting than that in New York City? In the notes, there are occasional tables providing some national or comparative data, and it is possible that Collins determined that New York City was not emblematic of the demographic trends of the nation's teachers; however, adding some national context–demographically and socially–could have greatly expanded the reach of this work, giving it an opportunity for national significance rather than regional interest.

Both of those weaknesses, as well as the author's admirable neutrality on the issues presented, lead to a dry writing style. *"Ethnically Qualified"* is not exactly a page turner, more easily read chapter by chapter rather than cover to cover; at times, it reads less like a narrative and more like a collection of data. In addition, while necessary in terms of scope to aggregate multiple minority categories in the analysis–combining Jewish, African American, and Hispanic teachers–it can be debated whether issues facing Jewish teachers are similar enough to those facing African American or Hispanic American teachers to merit this aggregation. In spite of its methodological shortcomings, this study is a solid addition to the libraries of historians of New York City schools, as well as scholars who study urban education and/or race and education. Overall, *"Ethnically Qualified"* is worthy of reading, as it provides sources in the footnotes for future research.

Notes

[1]. Statistics gathered, in order, from National Center for Education Statistics, "Schools and Staffing Survey," http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass0708_2009324_t1s_02.asp (accessed September 7, 2011); and U.S. Census Bureau, "USA Quickfacts," http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html (accessed September 7, 2011).

[2]. Statistics gathered from U.S. Census Bureau, "Wyoming Quickfacts," http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html (accessed September 7, 2011); U.S. Census Bureau, "New York Quickfacts," http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html (accessed September 7, 2011); and National Center for Education Statistics, "Schools and Staffing Survey," http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass0708_2009324_t1s_02.asp (accessed September 7, 2011).

[3]. National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, "Standard 4: Diversity," *Unit Standards in Effect 2008*, http://www.ncate.org/Standards/NCATEUnitStandards/UnitStan (accessed September 12, 2011).

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