News

A brown brick building with a "St. Hubert Catholic High School for Girls Home of the Bambies"

St. Hubert Catholic High School for Girls in Philadelphia is seen in this Feb. 9, 2023, photo. Three students at the school are being disciplined after a racist social media video they created came to light Feb. 7 amid Black History Month. (OSV News photo/Gina Christian)

Gina Christian

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A Catholic high school in Philadelphia is taking action after several of its students posted a racist social media video that has sparked community protests.

Three teens at St. Hubert Catholic High School for Girls, part of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's Office for Catholic Education, are being investigated for a clip featuring blackface and racial slurs.

The school said in a statement the students are currently "not present in school and are being disciplined appropriately."

A fourth student involved in the incident has been expelled from nearby Franklin Towne Charter High School, according to a statement by that school.

In the video -- which came to light Feb. 7 and appeared to be filmed outside of school hours in a residence -- one teen sprays another girls' face with dark paint while yelling, "You're a Black girl. You know your roots."

She then yells, "It's February!" in an apparent reference to Black History Month.

As at least one other teen looks on laughing and recording the incident on her cellphone, the girl with the spray paint says, "You're nothing but a slave. And after this you're doing my laundry."

The girl in blackface then replies, "I'm Black and I'm proud!"

An off-camera voice says, "Your mom is never letting anyone in. This takes the s--t, bro."

The original video has since been removed, but multiple screenshots and recordings have been distributed online and through local media, which blurred the faces of the teens for broadcast. OSV News viewed an unedited version of the video that was shared on Twitter by user @cocoxinaa.

In a Feb. 7 statement posted to the school’s Facebook account, St. Hubert president Lizanne Pando and principal Gina MacKenzie said they were "extremely disappointed to learn that anyone associated with (the school) would act in such a manner, which is entirely inconsistent with our values."

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The administrators said they "view racism as a mortal sin," adding "there is no place for it in our hearts and minds" and that "there is no tolerance for such behavior at (St.) Hubert's."

Roughly a dozen community members gathered to protest outside the school on the morning of Feb. 8, holding signs reading "Hate Hurts" and "Confront White Supremacy."

Protest organizer Adam McNeil told local media that after viewing the video he was "completely confused that we still have so much blatant racism in 2023."

Later that day, the school in conjunction with the archdiocese issued an updated statement, noting that extracurricular activities would be suspended and instruction shifted to an online format due to "reactionary general threats" made against the St. Hubert's community.

The statement pointed out the behavior in the video violated both the school's code of conduct and its "Responsible Use of Technology policy that applies to students both inside and outside of school."

Archdiocese and school administrators also asked St. Hubert parents "to remind your daughters that they are representatives of their school at all times, including on evenings and weekends outside of school."

School administrators also said that prior to the incident they "had been working closely with the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) to provide intensive programming" pursuant to a "No Place for Hate" designation from that organization.

The statement noted the school has asked ADL for "additional support … at this time," while "seeking resources" from the Archbishop's Commission on Racial Healing, convened by Philadelphia Archbishop Nelson J. Pérez in January 2021 following the high-profile killings of Black people, including George Floyd, throughout the nation. Counseling services also have been made available to students.

In a Feb. 8 news release, the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission offered to provide St. Hubert "bias and cultural sensitivity training for staff and students," which it has furnished to "schools in the past who have had similar challenges."

The commission’s executive director Chad Dion Lassiter said in the statement that although he was "pleased to see an immediate response from the school, it is imperative … (to) take appropriate action to ensure students know the racist background of 'blackface.'"

During the 19th century, actors in minstrel shows mocked Black people by performing with faces darkened by burnt cork or shoe polish. The practice -- which led to the infamous "Jim Crow" blackface character -- continued well into the 20th century.