

THE BACKGROUND

On July 9, 2019, Marian University welcomed its inaugural class of Saint Joseph's College of Marian University – Indianapolis – a small but mighty group of students representing a broad spectrum of racial and ethnic groups – and hailing from lands as far away as El Salvador and Honduras. With more than 70% of its incoming class representing racial minority groups, SJC is indeed a majority-minority two-year college. Given the history of Marian College, should this seem so unusual?

As I was walking through the basement hallways of the University's library early on the morning of Friday, August 23, 2019 (I remember the date because it was prior to an All-Faculty Meeting.), I perused more closely the black and white photos of Marian College graduates from the earliest decades of the college. Marian College came out of an early educational institution started by German immigrant Sister Theresa Hackelmeier, one of the founding Sisters of the Order of St. Francis of Oldenburg, IN, back in the early 1850s. It was originally created so that women could learn how to be teachers. The school became Marian College in 1936, opening in Indianapolis in 1937. And almost from the first, it welcomed students of all races, creeds, and ethnic origins.

I learned that day from closely examining the facial features, hair textures, and surnames of these early women -- that Marian College graduated its first Black woman student (Sister Sarah Page, OSF) as early as 1949! (My alma mater in South Carolina -- Clemson University -- didn't admit its first Black student -- Harvey Gantt -- until 1963!). There were also women with Spanish-appearing and other ethnic surnames, and early research reveals that women from Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Cuba, Japan, Thailand, etc., all attended and graduated from Marian College. The first Black man to graduate Marian -- A.E. Reeves -- graduated in 1959.

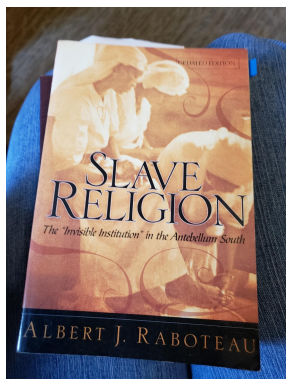
THE PROJECT

> **Research-Based:** Working with primary sources, including historical documents from the period like those highlighted here, students will research the time period, Indianapolis history, Marian College's early history, and the history of the Catholic church and Black people's place within the church.



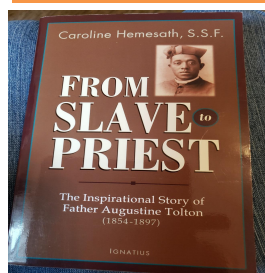
Norma Lewis Cummings
(1929-2014)
Marian College Class of 1951

> **Writing-Focused:** Working in pairs, students will bring the stories of some of Marian College's earliest women of color graduates to life, so that our students will know that their own educational path is not uncharted. It is, in fact, marked by excellence, courage and determination.



THE PROCESS

- **ENG 112 – Spring 2020 – Annotated Bibliography** -- Students will be introduced to the project by reading historical documents, including Sister Claire Whalen's 1966 dissertation which explored Marian College's history from 1937-1962, and books and articles by Drs. Jim Divita and Bill Doherty, Marian professors of history emeriti. They will create an **annotated bibliography** of important information gleaned from these source materials.
- **ENG 112 – Spring 2020 – Dialogic Inquiry** – Students will engage in a dialogue with invited guest speakers, including at least three former professors and students who authored primary source documents, about their recollections of the earliest days of Marian College in Indianapolis, the progressive spirit of the Sisters of Oldenburg, the tenacity required to open up a college to all who sought education beyond high school, and the challenges faced.
- **ENG 180 – Summer 2020 – Investigative Journalism** – Students will learn how to properly examine historical documents, including editions of *The Phoenix*, Marian College's newspaper, from the time period. An investigative journalist will be invited to share her expertise with us.
- **ENG 180 – Summer 2020 – Interviews/Biographical Sketches** – With the assistance of the MU Library staff, and the Office of Alumni and Parent Engagement, students will reach out to the family and friends of these earliest graduates, requesting interviews and contemporaneous sources of information in an effort to craft **biographical sketches** of as many Marian Women of Color Firsts as possible.
- **SPRING 2021** – Students will make Poster Presentations of their findings at the Center for Teaching and Learning Research Symposium.



THE IMPACT

Beyond the original intent of this project, which was to demonstrate to SJC students that they have a rightful place here at Marian University, this project now potentially will also serve as a timely reminder to all members of Marian University of the College's beginnings as a beacon of equality and social justice for all.

