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Diversity at CSB/SJU: Bits and Pieces of Our History

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Diversity at CSB/SJU:

Bits & Pieces of Our History
Land Acknowledgement

"Both the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University occupy the original homeland of the Dakhóta and Anishinaabe peoples. We honor, respect, and acknowledge the indigenous peoples forcibly removed from this territory, whose connection remains today. St. Benedict's Monastery and St. John's Abbey previously operated boarding schools for Native children. Now, students, faculty, and staff are working to repair relationships with our Native Nation neighbors."

Land acknowledgement statement approved in Spring 2021
by the Indigenous Student Association and
by the Joint Faculty Senate

With Diversity as our topic today (April 14, 2022), it is especially appropriate to start with our Land Acknowledgement statement. This statement was prompted by the consciousness-raising efforts of people on campus, especially our indigenous students. Their ancestral people, students in the Benedictines’ Indian Industrial Schools here, were in a long line of those impacted, for better or worse, by human actions stemming from religious motivations. (And this goes much, much further back in time than the 1800s!)
With Malik Stewart here to talk today about the Multicultural Center and their activities, and with the emphasis on DEIJ in our communities nowadays, I thought this would be a good opportunity to share a bit about the history of diversity at CSB and SJU. This is a "nutshell" view, and while I don't claim to be comprehensive, I do want to give some bits and pieces of what's been documented in the CSB & SJU Archives about the topic.
A word about trying to research diversity or early people of color at St. Ben’s and St. John’s in the Archives: it’s hard!!

Who was the first “foreign” [sic!] student?

Who was the first student from ___ [fill in the blank]? Or of ____ descent? Or of ___ race or religion, if they weren’t Catholic?

Such questions often weren’t asked, or records weren’t kept. And paging through photos in yearbooks is not a good solution.
St. Ben's and St. John's were diverse from the beginning; they were founded, after all, by “foreigners” - German immigrants or first-gens, in this most-German county in all of Minnesota.

Photos by the archivist, 2009.
People of German and other mostly European nationalities settling around Minnesota also sent their sons and daughters to St. John’s and St. Ben’s for an education.

Minnesota outline from https://www.pngkey.com/maxpic/u2q8r5o0o0r5e6u2/
Photo from Worship & Work, p. 93 (of the pdf)
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/10990/rec/1
Besides having the Indian Industrial Schools on the campuses for about a dozen years, we also had a few indigenous college students. With Benedictines from St. Ben's and St. John's continuing their ministries to the White Earth and Red Lake missions for many decades, we are all now learning more about the ethnic cleansing that took place. But there were also monks and sisters that were getting steeped in Native American traditions and wisdom and bringing some of that back to the campuses.

School Bulletin: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\Abbey documents scanned 2016\Industrial School\St. Benedict's Industrial School.pdf – p. 1 & 3
St. Ben’s Photo: SBM.02j Thirty students from the White Earth Reservation attending St. Benedict’s Industrial School (c. 1884), St. Joseph, MN.
Top text inset from Worship & Work, p. 146 http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/11072/rec/1
Photo: Industrial School 1892-001 SJAA glass plate neg.#825
An old saying in my German-American family was "Join the convent [or priesthood] and see the world." Benedictines were establishing communities in China, Japan, the Bahamas, and Puerto Rico - and students from those places started coming here for an education or to join these monasteries. For two small colleges in rural Minnesota, there was a surprising diversity here for much of our history.

_With hearts expanded: transformations in the lives of Benedictine women, St. Joseph, Minnesota, 1957 to 2000_ p. 296

https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/saint_benedicts_monastery_books/5/
(You can learn more about this in these sources, both of which are available on Vivarium via the Archives website.)

Online at

https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1004&context=saint_benedicts_monastery_books
The Benedictines would begin by ministering to the needs of the people wherever they went, and eventually, almost invariably, some of those people would want to become Benedictines themselves. Communities would be established, and some would come to St. Ben’s and St. John’s for an education or for religious formation. 

*With hearts expanded: transformations in the lives of Benedictine women, St. Joseph, Minnesota, 1957 to 2000*  p. 296
https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/saint_benedicts_monastery_books/5/  p. 298

*With hearts expanded: transformations in the lives of Benedictine women, St. Joseph, Minnesota, 1957 to 2000*
https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/saint_benedicts_monastery_books/5/

p. 306; photo on p. 304.
The Asian students who come to St. Ben’s and St. John’s may no longer come because of the monastic connection, but that’s how it began.


O:\Archives\csbarchives\Photos\People\Chinese students.bmp
The same goes for the Bahamas and Puerto Rico, for both St. Ben’s and St. John’s. Colman Barry wrote a whole book on the history of the connection to the Bahamas. 

*With hearts expanded: transformations in the lives of Benedictine women, St. Joseph, Minnesota, 1957 to 2000*

https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/saint_benedicts_monastery_books/5/ p. 319
For those of you who know Sister Eunice Antony, she is pictured here as a young nun stationed in Nassau.  
*With hearts expanded: transformations in the lives of Benedictine women, St. Joseph, Minnesota, 1957 to 2000*  
https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/saint_benedicts_monastery_books/5/  
Mother Henrita with sisters photo p. 342; S. Eunice p. 343
For many decades, until the Bahamas established its own schools of higher education, Bahamians came to St. Ben’s and St. John’s to get the education they needed to be teachers, administrators, and government officials back in their home country. For a while, CSB and SJU operated a college there as well, called the Benedictine University College, or the BUC. It closed in 2000. (There’s another whole “history lesson” on this linked form the Archives’ websites.)

CSB Archives: Coakley family photo 1983_Fall_Saint_Benedicts_Today_p1

http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/4034/rec/56

(The Record, December 11, 2003, p. 5

St. Ben’s international connections were touted in this photo in *With Lamps Burning*, the book about St. Ben’s first 100 years (and the college’s first 50 years). It was captioned “interracial character of St. Benedict’s student body” when the book was published in 1957.

*With Lamps Burning*, chapter 15, with photos before p. 181.
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/2516
Interestingly, that 1950s photo had been cropped. The full photo, in the St. Ben’s Monastery Archives, included five sisters who were also international. The sisters and students in this photo hailed from Mexico, Formosa (i.e. Taiwan), China, Japan, Korea, and New Zealand; also included were a Native American and several African Americans. These African American Bennies were not the first ones to study here, however...
Names at https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SBM/id/446.
This photo, cropped to show only the students, also appears in With Lamps Burning, on the page before page 181.
...that distinction goes to a pair of students, Kathleen Yanes and Gertrude Danavall, who were here in the 1930s. Attracting and keeping U.S. students of color here was, in a way, more challenging for these two Catholic colleges. But it was Christian and Benedictine principles that motivated a couple of white Bennies from Minnesota, Jo Zehnle & Betty Schneider, to spend the summer of 1938 in Harlem in New York as social workers in a “Friendship House”- an interracial movement in the 1930s. In the fall, all four women were together here as Bennies.


*With Lamps Burning* by Grace McDonald, OSB (c. 1957), p. 198: “In 1938 St. Benedict’s opened its doors to the first Negro students who applied for admission. During that summer, Betty Schneider and Josephine Zehnle had decided to see for themselves what Friendship House was like. Thus they met two young Negro women, Kathleen Yanes and Gertrude Danavall, ready and eager to attend college. Remembering all they had learned of Christian sociology, Betty and Josephine knew there was only one place for their new friends, St. Benedict’s.”

Schneider photo: https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/9341/rec/1

Zehnle photo: https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/9343/rec/1
Gertrude Danavall left after one year, but Kathleen stayed to be the first Black graduate from CSB, and other American students of color followed, albeit gradually. Here is a list and a few yearbook photos of some of the others.

St. Ben’s Monastery Archives RG 22  Box 11  file 7  Office of the Registrar-- Negro students list: 1938-1955

Group photo in caps & gowns: 1940 Facula p. 30 (of the pdf)
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/7041/rec/3

Consuelo Romero ‘43 photo:

Faye Schuck ‘51 photo:

Loretta Wingo ‘49 photo;

Patricia Gaines ‘55 photo:
Joyce Williams ‘48 from Mississippi was the first Black woman to join the St. Ben’s Monastery, though she faced discrimination in doing so. After graduation, Joyce applied to be a Sister multiple times, but was rejected by the Prioress who has been quoted as saying, “Absolutely not!” and “We don’t even know what you eat!” – even though she had been at St. Ben’s for years as a student. Williams was determined, and when she applied a third time, the new Prioress accepted her. After the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., she began her career as a civil rights activist.

Senior photo p. 29
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/7459/rec/6 in the 1948 Facula yearbook
SBMA photos from Crossings (Stearns History Museum) article by Owen Lindblad OSB
March 2009 pages 3 & 9 (S. Joyce) and 10
See also https://csbsjulib.omeka.net/exhibits/show/black-voices-at-csbsju/sister-joyce-Williams (online library exhibit)
The story of the coming to St. John's by Black students and faculty, by the way, is pretty thoroughly documented in the Winter/Spring 2021 issue of the SJU Alumni Magazine – available online in Vivarium.

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/49960/rec/4

SEE ALSO We've Only Just Begun: Students' Experiences During the 1970's [video]

https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/history_lectures/3/: Four SJU alumni discuss their experiences and activities on campus during the 1970s and how their time at CSB/SJU influenced their lives. [video]
“To all the religious-minded, free-thinking students who understand the problem, we hope for more power to you in the future. To all students who are not quite ready for human understanding between races, we encourage you to take up a course in sociology immediately.”

- the OBU in the October 1969 Prep World

The Prep School also struggled with increasing its diversity; its “Organization of Blacks United” issued this statement to their classmates.

Image: January 1970 Prep World p. 61
Quote: October 1969 Prep World, p. 17
And, going beyond race, nationality and ethnicity, campus DEIJ efforts extend to those who are not cis-gendered. This invitation to the Lavender graduation is from 2009, but the event began back in 2004 when John Yoakam, a professor of social work at CSB/SJU and a gay rights activist, helped to organize the first one. John was a faculty sponsor of Prism, the campus organization at that time for GLBT students. The organization’s wider scope is now reflected by the LGBTQIA+ acronym, aka “Q+” - with a growing presence on the campuses....or, perhaps, an increasingly acknowledged presence on the campuses.

Yoakam image from The Record January 27, 2005, p. 1
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/32343/rec/3
Lavender Graduation image from O:\Archives\csbarchives\Digital Archives\Events\Lavender Graduation\2009
Text from Timeline, 2004 entry
https://apps.csbsju.edu/csbarchives/TimeLineDetails.aspx?id=1000 and from https://www.csbsju.edu/about/college-of-saint-benedict/csb-history/csb-memory-walk:
We certainly have a way to go to be completely anti-racist and accepting of all, but progress is being made and we are “Becoming Community.”