**Akaiia Ridley**

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My 2020 FURSCA research project is titled “Black Teachers Matter: Albion Public Schools: Going South to Historically Black Colleges and Universities to Create a Teaching Faculty that Looks Like Its Student Population.” This project is centered around the fact currently the local school district, Marshal Public Schools, does not have hardly any black teachers. Marshall Public School district recently received a large number of black and other minority students following the annexation with Albion Public Schools in 2014. The students were not followed by teachers who looked like them nor were they greeted by these individuals. My goal is to try to inform the Marshall Public School district on the impacts that having black teachers will bring to the school system. To do this, I researched the history of Albion’s role in the Great Migration and how the school board found out that there was a lack of black teachers, so they went south to Historically Black Colleges and Universities to recruit teachers to come here. To achieve this goal, we interviewed five women who were recruited from the south to come to teach in the 1970s. These women are Mae Ola Dunklin, Eddie Williams, Barbara Davis, Vivian Davis, and Hazel Lias. Our ultimate goal was to use the interviews of the five women to show the importance of having black educators. These women grew up in the heart of the south, where black students may have only had teachers who looked like them, and they went to college and had all black professors. This fact shaped them as women and were examples of what to become when they entered education for themselves.

We achieved the goal of interviewing with four of the five women, one of them was not able to talk with us as her husband recently passed away. The women that we did get to speak with were very willing to participate and gave us as much information as possible. COVID-19 was a limit in what we were able to do. Our original plan was to use library archival resources at the Albion District Library and do oral recordings of the interviews in person. With the change, we were limited to communication by email and Zoom meetings. The most important aspect of our research was not only to highlight the biographies of the five women but to get a perspective of why they felt black teachers mattered. Specifically, in my presentation, I noted some quotes from the women that stood out to me. Together, belief is that students of color would be more likely to respond to a teacher who not only looks like them but also understands their lives the way they are. A direct quote from Barbara Davis: “We have to build possible respect and concern for their education and member of our community. If they see that you truly have concern for them, they will show respect.”

The importance of this project is to encourage Marshall School District and superintendent, Randy Davis, to find ways to incorporate black teachers and administration into their system. My plans are to continue this research and interview more people. As the women have explained how they feel, we would like to interview other students, parents, and community members to see how they feel about this topic. I want to hear from those who have had black teachers and their experiences, as well as from those who have not had the opportunity to have black teachers. Listening to the interviews and hearing the actual value will help the project be successful in encouraging Dr. Davis and Marshall to use the same methods as Albion did to find teachers.

I plan to present my findings and project during the Spring of 2021 at the Elkin Isaac Symposium. Until then, I am going to continue to read and conduct interviews so that I can prepare for the next presentation. I am currently in the process of talking with my advisor about how this project can be transformed into a thesis. The topic of Black Teachers Matter is and will continue to be relevant. As time goes on, there will be more and more findings to support my claim, meaning there will always be work to be done.

This project made a difference to me and holds importance in my life. Growing up, I didn't have very many black teachers myself. I was a part of the transition to Marshall schools from Albion. While I was grateful for the better opportunities that were given to me in the new school district, I would’ve benefitted more on a personal level if I had teachers that understood my life and its story. I am very grateful for the opportunity that I have had to explore the topic of “Black Teachers Matter” that was given to me through the FURSCA research program.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the Jean Bengel Laughlin, '50 and Sheldon Laughlin Endowment for Student Research for contributing to my success. Without your funding and support, this project would not be possible. Thank you for trusting in me to use these funds to better my research. It is a wonderful opportunity to be granted this funding, and I will continue to work hard and contribute to the college and community.

Some photos of the women that were interviewed. The photos are courtesy of Dr. Wesley and Leslie Dick and the 2020 First-Year Seminar, *A Sense of Place: Albion and the American Dream*

  