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Nicholas D. Sawicki

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AN HISTORICAL MOMENT

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Jesuit Educational Excellence since 1841

By Nicholas D. Sawicki



Founding Father

Fordham University, founded as St. John’s College in 1841, was established by John Hughes, the first archbishop of New York, to serve as a catalyst to advance New York’s largely immigrant community. A native son of Ireland himself, Archbishop Hughes was greatly concerned with the mistreatment of the



Archbishop John Hughes

Irish in New York and founded a number of institutions that sought to protect the immigrant and the poor alike, including the parochial school system, the Emigrant Savings Bank, and St. John’s College, with the intent of furthering the Catholic pedagogical tradition in North America and establishing a Catholic professional class in New York.

The fledgling college suffered through its first five years from a combination of inconsistent management and the sometimes explosive, and indomitable, nature of the archbishop’s temperament. In 1846, the Society of Jesus accepted Hughes’s invitation to take over St. John’s College and began a

Left: The University Church was built as a parish church in 1845.



legacy of academic excellence. The Society took a college suffering from poor enrollment and lacking in standards and created a vibrant community that, at times, was both a country estate separate from the city of New York and at the same time deeply entwined with its history and growth. The results of the first half-century speak for themselves, with St. John's producing such figures as the artist John LaFarge, Sr., the Civil War hero Robert Gould Shaw, the historian John Gilmary Shea, and Cardinal John Farley, amongst others.

Hughes's legacy is, in many ways, found in more than the physical brick and mortar foundations throughout New York. In such institutions as Fordham and St. Patrick's Cathedral, Hughes produced institutions and structures that turn both the heart and mind of all people to God.

Lincoln Center

The most notable development of the 20th century for Fordham is undoubtedly the creation of Fordham University at Lincoln Center. As St. John's College continued to grow, it transformed from a parochial college into Fordham University in 1907. The first quarter of the century witnessed the openings of the schools of law, medicine, pharmacy, arts and sciences,

business, education, and social service as well as the Manhattan Division (which began in 1847 and expanded in 1913). This massive growth required more space than was available at the traditional Rose Hill campus in the Bronx and a more permanent location on the island of Manhattan.

To accommodate this growth, Fordham committed itself to the Lincoln Square Renewal Project, moving the School of Law to the site in 1961 and various other colleges starting in 1968. Fordham University at Lincoln Center has since come to house three undergraduate colleges and four graduate schools. The campus, with a heavy commuter and international population, has allowed the university to expand its programs in regards to the arts, including strategic partnerships with the Juilliard School of Music and the Alvin Ailey School of Dance.

The cosmopolitan nature of the Lincoln Center campus, balancing the more traditional setting of the Rose Hill campus in the Bronx, carries Fordham's presence between two boroughs of the city of New York.

Nicholas D. Sawicki, a 2016 graduate of Fordham, is the Special Assistant to the President & Editor in Chief at America Media.

Top to bottom:
November 1859, the Rose Hill Base-Ball Club competes in the first college baseball game played under NY rules.
The Class of 1907.
President Franklin Delano Roosevelt makes a campaign stop at Fordham, October 1940.
Fordham trustee Joseph A. Martino; Laurence J. McGinley, S.J., president of Fordham; and Fordham Law Dean William Hughes Mulligan at the site of the Lincoln Center campus, 1959.

All photos courtesy of Fordham University Archives.