

Nina Hamilton Anthony Addresses the Board of Trustees on Race Relations (November 1946)

The November 1946 meeting of the Antioch College Board of Trustees was in many ways a typical one. As usual, finances (and lack thereof) dominated the conversation. But when Algo Henderson was president, to make sure that the proceedings would not be limited to discussions of dollars, he would schedule for the Trustees programs which give glimpses of particular elements of the Antioch plan of education.

The topic, so the minutes say, was
the educational program in race relations,

and was led by the inimitable Jessie Cambron Treichler, whose introductory remarks are reprinted below. Mrs. Treichler's name is well known to Antiochians, or at least it should be, as the greatest individual force for integration in the College's history. As founder and chair of the Race Relations Committee, she led the way in recruiting black students (and perhaps, more importantly, found the necessary tuition money as well), beginning in the 1940s. Coretta Scott King, her sister Edythe, and A. Leon Higginbotham are among the luminescent people made Antiochians largely by her efforts.

These program-related presentations to the Board were most effectively communicated by the students themselves. Three were on the schedule that day, including Nina Hamilton Anthony, whose presentation follows. Nina never finished college, nor did her famous sister, the novelist Virginia Hamilton, but they were practically raised on campus and personally educated by her father on concepts of race and equality. He was the remarkable Kenny Hamilton, longtime manager of many a student waiter in the old Antioch Tearoom. His soulful visage stands at the center of a mural of the Tearoom in Antiochiana done by one of his former employees, Ann Parker, a student in the 1930s.

The first student speaker today is Mrs. Nina Hamilton Anthony, junior student at Antioch. Her father, Mr. Kenneth Hamilton, is Head Waiter at the Tearoom with instructor's status, because he has probably had to train more Antioch students than any other employer, and probably knows more of them better than most of the faculty. Nina entered Antioch in the fall of 1943. A local girl, she was valedictorian of her class at Bryan High School in 1943, and was awarded the two-year Bryan High School Scholarship, which is given each year by Antioch to the top-ranking graduate of Bryan. Nina is journalism major. She has had work experience as a mimeograph operator for the College Service Department, as secretary to Mr. Vernet of Vernay Laboratories, as secretary at the Cleveland Urban League, as cub reporter for the Pittsburgh Courier in Detroit. Last summer she married the young man, David Anthony, to whom she had been engaged since high school days. She is working at present as secretary to the Assistant Dean of Students. I asked her to try to think in racial terms, something she seldom does, and try to estimate the values of Antioch's educational system as a Negro student participating in it.

Growing up in mixed neighborhoods, going to mixed elementary and high schools, and then going to college at a mixed Antioch has helped to develop me along the lines of symmetry, for which Antioch still strives, perhaps to a greater degree than any other single factor in my background. Segregated environments I have since learned, through some of my work experiences at Antioch, are unrealistic doges of actuality, breeding fear, prejudice, suspicion and hate. I have been fortunate enough to escape this kind of situation through fifteen years of formal schooling.

I have been fortunate enough also to understand that, first of all, as a human being, and secondly, as a Negro, I cannot face the world and the problems which are a part of it by turning my back to the problems or burying my head in the sand when I choose to live in a segregated environment, learn in segregated schools or teach in segregated schools.

I have been fortunate enough to understand that I can't as a human being and a white person sit in Congress and pass laws which will affect people the world over, of all religious and political beliefs, with varying degrees of skin pigmentation when the only contact I've had with any people is from a pedestal of lily-white supremacy.

I graduated from a mixed high school valedictorian of my class and won a two-year scholarship to Antioch. To a naive graduate of the local high school, native of an Ohio village, daughter of normal, poor, conservative parents, Antioch seemed to me the epitomy of liberalism and good in the world. True, I'd always lived in a mixed situation. But something happens when you leave elementary school and enter high school. You suddenly stop seeing your friends and classmates as individuals and start seeing them as members of whatever group their color, their religion, their nationality, or their economic class obligates them to in society. You start feeling and living the superficialities of society when you pass elementary level'a peculiar phenomenon of our society, but hardly an inevitable one. It is heartbreaking when you think what a little straightforward guidance on the part of parents and teachers could do. Antioch, in contrast, did seem to be the guiding light.

Students at Antioch were different, I was sure. Believing this perhaps lead to one of my greatest disappointments (though this disappointment did change to understanding gradually) because I found many Antiochians who were typical of the kinds I'd left behind in high school. As I continued living in the Antioch community, joining various committees and at one time being unanimously elected to the presidency of my hall, my disappointment grew less and understanding took its place. The reason? The same reason which makes the Antioch program vitally different from other college programs and which makes it a progressive program. At Antioch, all beliefs and ideas are challenged at some time or another, in some way or another'perhaps in a class'room'perhaps in a New York subway. All beliefs and ideas are subject to change when new facts and scientific proofs reveal that the old beliefs and ideas are invalid. This kind of flexibility of thought is necessary for social progress, just as it is necessary

for scientific progress. This is the kind of flexibility of thought which was needed in my high school and other high schools, colleges and universities.

When I recall my work experiences at Antioch, I find a verification in actual circumstances of many of the things I've done some generalizing about here. The job that did the most to co-ordinate the ideas I'd gathered with real living and working was my job at the Vernay Patents Company, Yellow Springs, Ohio. Here Negroes, Nisei, whites, Jews, and Gentiles, about 20 in all, worked together, belonged to a union together, went to union meetings together and shop parties together with no degenerating results'we won the much coveted [Army-Navy] E-Award [for excellence in production of war equipment]. Quite a contrast to an incident on another job I had, this time in a large industrial city where racial lines were so strict that they ripped apart a few years back causing deaths and injuries to members of both races. People who had lived through the riot told me that an amazing thing had happened. Those neighborhoods of an inter-racial composition went unharmed! Perhaps amazing, but it also should have been a lesson in living. The superficiality of segregation was proved further when the outstanding Negroes and the outstanding white people of the city met together in an inter-racial dinner. The dinner appeared to be a flop and a show of mutual distrust to me when all the Negroes sat together and all the white people sat together. But, how could they feel natural when the only time they see each other is once a year at an inter-racial dinner.

These have been the outstanding of my experiences at Antioch. I have learned much and have seen my white friends and classmates learn just as much. It's a gradual, thorough process. Antioch doesn't change you from a reactionary to a radical, or vice versa, but it can change you from a reactionary or radical to a realist.

Nina Anthony

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