

Disrupting Racism: Next Steps by Anita Coleman

2018 Churchwide Gathering, Presbyterian Women

Sat. Aug. 5, 2018, 1:45 – 3: 00 pm

My Anti-racism Story

By Anne Sivley, Moderator of the PWP Los Ranchos, July 2018

The year was 1994. A longtime veteran of the classroom, I was a third- year vice-principal. I was very excited because I was to be in charge of the brand new elementary school in the district. We were adjacent to the continuation high school, of which the principal was in charge. I was to be responsible for the elementary school. This was a dream come true. I not only ordered everything for the school, but I hired all the teachers.

School was nestled in a middle class neighborhood composed mainly of Caucasian families. Everything was set for school to begin. Unlike any of the other schools in the district, a large majority of the students here were to be bused from the nearby projects which consisted mostly of African-Americans. To my dismay, many of the parents in the neighborhood pulled their children out and enrolled them in private schools, saying they didn't want anything to do with the school and those kids!

The teachers began to complain about the children and their behavior. They had difficulties learning, they said, and I could see the teachers were becoming frustrated. As the semester wore on, little by little the African-American children's behavior was coming under control. Things settled down but I still heard complaining from some teachers.

In November of that year we had a school bond election, and I decided to use the time to visit the projects meet and get to know the parents and children to better understand their culture. What a learning experience. Everyone welcomed me and I had great discussions with the parents and the children seeing what their home environment was like. I found I wanted to understand African-America culture better. I also bought and read a book called *Raising Black Children* by two leading psychiatrists. Such insight I got and was able to impart to others.

What we discovered was when the children were dismissed for winter break, their behavior was pretty good, but when they returned in January, the teachers had to begin all over again with the African –American children. You see, they all returned to their natural home environment and culture and lost “the white ways.”

I can remember talking to both parents and grandparents during conferences. One grandparent at 60+ said she was raising the children of both her children due to drugs. She never dreamed she would have to do that. She still had to work because of it. What dedication she had to see that her grandchildren got an education.

Overall, I am so fortunate I had that 1994 experience because I felt I gained much. Having traveled now to different corners of the world, I look forward to learning about new cultures.

Disrupting Racism: Next Steps by Anita Coleman

2018 Churchwide Gathering, Presbyterian Women

Sat. Aug. 5, 2018, 1:45 – 3: 00 pm

Attitude is everything. We can all learn from one another. Having had two near death illnesses, I know without a doubt, life is about how we relate to one another. Understanding builds relationships. It is key!

Lesson by Anita Coleman

Jesus was aware of the social conditions of his time, the structures of power and privilege. He declared his ministry by rising up in the synagogue, and reading a prophetic passage: He's come to set the oppressed free. In the next 3 years, with his disciples and followers who often were from the margins of society, Jesus created a revolutionary alternate structure based on love and loyalty, a community of sharing, where everyone was equal, and served one another. Jesus rejected privilege and demonstrated non-violence. Jesus was woke.

In the book, *Rise, Shine, Be Woke* 7 voices share their lived experiences. Their narratives show that decentering whiteness is critical to racial equity. As followers of Jesus we are all called to rise, shine, be woke. We do that when we move to end our participation in unjust systems. Called to revolutionary love, we rise, shine a light, on the Other, those who've been historically left out of mainstream society's privileges. We become woke in our spheres of influence 24/7 and we create what Martin Luther King Jr. called the Beloved Community. This is the biblical idea of a community in which people are accepted, loved and treated as they need to be treated. It is like Jesus' Kingdom of God, which has been interpreted as kin-dom –a kinship, a family based on mutual love and shared power and service. Thus, after today, you will want to identify and commit to an anti-racist action or strategy. If you're new to anti-racism make an intention to explore growing your unique anti-racist voice and identity. Anne's story provides an example.

Objective: The goal of Christian anti-racism is racial equity and the "Beloved Community." Anti-racism education helps individuals understand the source and consequences of racism as well as their own role in continuing racism or transforming it by their choice of action or strategy. Therefore, at the end of this activity, the participant will freely identify an anti-racist action/practice.

Discussion questions:

- 1) What are some of the things Anne did to help her African American students?
- 2) What do you think Anne means when she writes that the children lost "the white ways"?
- 3) Consider and reflect, discuss this finding: Without question, when the majority of students in public schools are students of color and only 18 percent of our teachers are teachers of color, we have an urgent need to act. We've got to understand that all students benefit from teacher diversity. We have strong evidence that students of color benefit from having teachers and leaders who look like them as role models and also benefit from the classroom dynamics that diversity creates. But it is also important for our white

Disrupting Racism: Next Steps by Anita Coleman

2018 Churchwide Gathering, Presbyterian Women

Sat. Aug. 5, 2018, 1:45 – 3: 00 pm

students to see teachers of color in leadership roles in their classrooms and communities.

The question for the nation is how do we address this quickly and thoughtfully?

- John King, 2016.

Key Concept: Woke – Aware of race, racism, racialization, and having the ability, confidence, persistence to challenge, interrupt, erode, and eliminate all forms of racism and its manifestations in one’s sphere of influence.

Challenging Concept: Assimilation, like tolerance, has gotten a bad rap. Some amount of assimilation, however, is necessary in a society that works for all. The challenges are in finding the power balance and that’s why we often hear statements like: “I’m not a racist but they’ve been here for decades, why can’t they just speak English?” (This is the expectation of linguistic assimilation) Here’s how the encyclopedia defines assimilation:

“**Assimilation**, in anthropology and sociology, the process whereby individuals or groups of differing ethnic heritage are absorbed into the dominant [culture](#) of a society. The process of [assimilating](#) involves taking on the traits of the dominant culture to such a degree that the assimilating group becomes socially indistinguishable from other members of the society. As such, assimilation is the most extreme form of [acculturation](#). Although assimilation may be compelled through force or undertaken voluntarily, it is rare for a [minority group](#) to replace its previous cultural practices completely; religion, food preferences, proxemics (e.g., the physical distance between people in a given social situation), and [aesthetics](#) are among the characteristics that tend to be most resistant to change. Assimilation does not denote “racial” or biological fusion, though such fusion may occur.” Encyclopedia Britannica, online, <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/assimilation-society>> Last retrieved July 27, 2018.

Key Take-away: Anne’s story shows that we must not only welcome differences but initiate and continue ongoing engagement - build relationships, strengthen communities - with **the different communities on their home turf**. We do this not by going in as saviors but as servants and companions on the journey.

Linking Talk to Action: What is a specific way in which you can link what you’ve learned from Anne’s story to action that you can easily adopt as a daily practice or strategy that you can follow (act upon) to disrupt racism?

References and Resources:

Anita Coleman, “Growing a Personal Anti-racist Voice and Identity,” *Anti-Racism Digital Library*, accessed July 27, 2018, <https://sacred.omeka.net/items/show/232>.

The State of Racial Disparity in the Educator Workforce. 2016, accessed July 27, 2018. <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/racial-diversity/state-racial-diversity-workforce.pdf>