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Introduction of Anita Lobel

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Founder's Day
Introduction of Anita Lobel
25 February 2015
Jonathan D. Green

165 years ago the founders of this great university established Illinois Wesleyan as "an Institution of Learning, which shall shed brightness on all the land around and send down floods of light and blessedness upon generations yet to come."¹ Generations have been blessed and enlightened as a result of their commitment to a brighter future through education, but as Dr. King said on our campus, "We still have long, long way to go."²

This year we are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act, and yet we now see that important legislation being challenged and eroded through nefarious legal efforts including *Shelby County Alabama v. Holder*. During the past decade we have seen remarkable achievements in marriage equality for gay and lesbian members of our community, and yet the FBI has reported that over 20% of hate crimes in the United States have been in response to sexual orientation.

The fatal shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson last August and Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida in 2012 are grim reminders of Cornel West's acknowledgement that race still matters. Ignorance and intolerance are not the exclusive property of our nation. The Anti-Defamation League states that 26% of the world's population harbors some Anti-Semitic attitudes. On a daily basis, around the world and at home, we see crimes and acts of intolerance committed in the name of religions founded on doctrines of love and compassion.

All year, we have been using the metaphor of "Walls and Bridges" to discuss those things that divide us, and the means for transcending those divisions.

As William Smith wrote in *A General Idea of the College of Mirania*, his 1753 utopian essay on education that formed the foundation for the systematized curriculum that would become the model for the creation of the American Liberal Arts College:

Hence it appears...of what lasting importance it is, to accustom youth early to distinguish the True from the False, by directing their Studies to such Things as come more immediately home to their Business and Bosoms. Were Men as generally agreed what these Things are, as they soon would be, cou'd they lay Passion and Prejudice wholly aside, then indeed the Business of Education wou'd be short, easy, and pleasant; and the Government of Mirania would have no Difficulty in fixing on a proper and unexceptional Plan for this Purpose. But they saw with Concern that while there were Passion, Prejudice, Custom, Malice, Pride, Ignorance, and different Opinions in the Province to

¹ Illinois Wesleyan University Admissions Circular, 1851.

² MLK: Speech at IWU, 1966

Struggle with, the best Scheme they could concert would not be alike acceptable to all, and would be liable to many Exceptions and Misconstructions. — No matter: They did not deter from there duty.³

It is the struggle with “Passion, Prejudice, Custom, Malice, Pride, Ignorance, and different Opinions” that leads us to Enlightenment. These bridges are the “floods of light and blessedness” of our founders’ dreams, and our guest speaker provides us with a personal example of the best of these aspirations.

Anita Lobel is an award-winning artist and illustrator and the author of *No Pretty Pictures*, a memoir recounting her experiences as a victim of the holocaust. Following a nightmarish youth she has made a life filled with pretty pictures. Following her rescue from the notorious Ravensbrück concentration camp, she was reunited with her parents in Sweden. In 1952, her family moved to New York where she graduated high school and completed a BFA at the Pratt Institute. It was at Pratt she met her late husband, the children’s author and illustrator, Arnold Lobel with whom she would collaborate on many books. Her first book, which she wrote and illustrated in 1965, was *Sven’s Bridge*. *The New York Times Review of Books* named it a Best Illustrated Book, and thus began a career producing nearly 60 books and numerous awards and honors.

Anita Lobel’s life and works are proof that the power of art and the written word can help us to find our place in a complex and conflicted world and to provide our lives with “floods of light and blessedness.”

Please help me to welcome Anita Lobel.

³ Smith, William: *A General Idea of the College of Mirania*, 12-13. New York: J. Parker and W. Weyman, 1753.