

“Loving the Unlovable”

Good evening, class. Time to spread the gospel. Or as is sometimes preached from the pulpit, “Can I have a Witness!” Tonight’s class is about catching a certain spirit, one that I caught long ago and cannot seem to shake loose. And rather than following our normal process where I would call upon some of you to address a philosophical kind of question that does not have a simple or obvious answer, this evening, I’ll be giving more of a lecture. We’ll save the experiential learning session for next time. And if you need to refresh your beverage of choice or use the facilities at any time, since I tend to become a bit longwinded, as my family is often happy to tell me, then by all means get up and do what you need to do, just don’t let me see you messing around with any technology devices.

I’ll begin by recalling a person who entered my life for the first time during my senior year in college, Nat (as in Nathaniel) French. I was attending Warren Wilson College in Asheville, North Carolina, a small liberal arts school similar to Berea College in Kentucky where every student works approximately 15 hours a week doing whatever is necessary to operate the campus. I was young and Nat was a couple of years away from retiring as a professor from the University of Massachusetts – Amherst. Before that, Nat had spent several decades as the Headmaster of the North Shore Country Day School in Chicago. Nat was a lifelong professional educator. A college mentor introduced me to him. I decided to attend graduate school at UMASS – Amherst where Nat and I became close friends.

I’m thinking....Dear Nat,

It is Saturday, January 10, 2016. The location is South Boston, a 90 minute drive north of Westport Point, Massachusetts where you drew your last breath during the spring of 1983. I remain grateful that I spent the previous weekend with you and Edie, your lovely wife. I'll never forget when she called and gave me the news. What I regret is that I lost track of Edie a year later. I wish I could remember more, the talks we would have about education and a young person's development. They certainly benefited me as I became an Assistant Dean of Students at Hampshire College in Amherst.

And that is what this lecture is partly about. Trying to recall and remember the things that can really matter during that period in one's life during and after college, when trying to get on with becoming a full-fledged adult. What were the most meaningful ideas, values, relationships, and words to live by each and every day? As a lifelong educator, those were just the kinds of questions you continuously pondered and about which you wondered. But we'll get to that in due course. Let me get back to where I am now and what I'm seeing and hearing.

I'm standing in the lobby of the Institute of Contemporary Art – Boston. I am married now to a wonderful woman, Deborah, who also values art in many of the same ways that you and I used to discuss, but with much insight than I ever had. We specifically came to Boston to see the art exhibition – “Leap Before You Look.” It's about Black Mountain College and the role art played in the life of the college. You would have been humbled and pleased, having graduated from Black Mountain and having been instrumental in the school's creation. Just know that it is exciting to see all the visitors to this exhibition, many of whom will probably be learning about Black Mountain College for the very first time.

The Leap into the unknown that you and the small number of students and faculty made back in 1933, to start your own liberal arts college from scratch, not even knowing where to locate it, and then to wind up in the tiny hamlet of Black Mountain, North Carolina, 15 miles east of Asheville, well, you would feel more than a modicum of gratification to see how many people are here on a freezing cold and icy Saturday, 83 years later. The entire museum is jam packed. And I can also assure you that the questions you and others struggled to realize concerning what a liberal arts college education could mean, remain relevant to the present. The story of what the students and teachers who spent time at Black Mountain went on to do throughout their lives and the impact upon others even to this day is quite remarkable. Many changed our country, a few the world. But what would have been most important to you is that the vast majority, based upon their collected stories, went on to lead meaningful and rewarding lives, making many contributions to their families and communities. I wonder if you and others who were there at the founding had any sense of what the possibilities could be, or what was to come.

Although lacking in any substantial quantitative research data, I am confident in stating that for such a small number of total students, and faculty that passed through the college, approximately 1,500, an average of just 62 people per year, I can think of no other college in American history that has packed a more powerful punch for its size. So what evidence can I present to make such a case? Consider that in 2016 alone there is not only the ICA – Boston exhibition that travels next to the Hammer Museum at UCLA and then a final stop in the buckeye state. There has also been a major exhibition in Europe, “Black Mountain – An Interdisciplinary Experiment 1933 - 1957.” Berlin is its hub city

with smaller exhibits staged in other countries. Plus, the Yale University Art Museum put on an exhibition associated with Black Mountain's art teacher, Joseph Albers. All of the exhibitions have received high praise from across the country. As the New York Times wrote, "Few legends loom quite as large as that of Black Mountain College."

For millions of Americans, starting out in college each fall and having a roommate, or living on one's own, means also starting out on the road to adulthood. The individual is no longer living at home, and even if he or she continues to do so, the rules from high school have usually changed. The individual is beginning to size up his or her circumstances, determining what his or her best options are, and starting to make his or her own decisions one moment after another.

Therefore, what I want to argue in tonight's paper is that a tiny little college, conceived and hatched during the Great Depression in the early 1930s, that struggled to stay afloat during the World War II period, and then flamed out of existence by the mid-1950s, may just offer some valuable insights for those engaging the field of higher education today and in the future. The lessons learned may also have relevance whether you are a student trying get as much out of the college experience as possible, a dedicated teacher, caring administrator, generous funder, loyal alumni, or responsible trustee.

I do not mean to suggest that BMC is the panacea answer to the range of problems and challenges those in higher education are trying to address. Rather, Black Mountain provides a barometer of sorts, a benchmark comparable. Let there be no misunderstanding, Black Mountain College had several shortcomings.

It was a turbulent place that could never achieve the right balance between deciding upon the best ideas and how to implement them. The college eventually failed to attract enough students and teachers who could get along and sustain themselves. It went bankrupt, end of story.

At Black Mountain, the educational mission was completely focused on what you needed to experience so you were well prepared to make well thought out decisions going forward. Moment by moment, day after day, throughout your entire life. That was the overall objective. As expressed by a founding leader of the school: “The new college was to be an experiment in pure democracy, 24-hour-a-day ‘education of the whole man by a whole man.’”

The first thing to understand is that the story of BMC is not yet over. The sparks of creativity, experimentation and impact continue. It all began in April of 1933. Orlando, Florida, in Winter Park to be precise, at Rollins College. Black Mountain’s origins derive from the thought and actions of a singular individual – John Andrew Rice. Rice was a 50ish year-old professor of classics. Prior to Rollins, Rice taught at the University of Nebraska. He was a native South Carolinian, son of a Methodist minister, a standout student at the renowned Webb School in Tennessee, a graduate of Tulane and then a Rhodes Scholar. As described in Time Magazine in 1942, Rice “...grew up in a family of South Carolina individualists and became one himself, a rebel among rebels.”

An ardent practitioner of the Socratic Method, Rice pursued a line of inquiry with his students that got them to think on their own. He also had a quick tongue and a prickly personality to match. In his autobiography, *I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century*, Rice describe some of his colleagues at the University of Nebraska as “incompetents, misfits, the intellectually lazy, and trash.” At Rollins,

he was constantly criticizing the school's educational policies and the President's leadership and decisions, which eventually led to the President firing Rice on the grounds of corrupting youth.

The official reasons ranged from wearing a jock strap in public, swimming in white bathing trunks, to displaying nude pictures of Roman figures on the walls in his classroom, but students and faculty alike knew that the conflicts ran much deeper. Rice appealed the charges vociferously with several students and faculty coming to his defense. A month-long campus-wide debate ensued with public hearings. Officials from the American Association of University Professors reviewed the claims and counterclaims between Rice and the President and determined that Rice should be reinstated. But the damage was done. Two other faculty members who defended Rice were also fired.

As the campus brouhaha raged, Rice's detractors said that if he knew so much about how a liberal arts college ought to be organized and function, then he should just go start his own college. Rice never indicated to others that he had any interest in doing such a thing, in fact, he had promised his wife that he would not teach anymore since he had difficulties getting along with colleagues. However, one particular faculty supporter of Rice's who had also been fired along with him urged him to start a new college. Rice understood that it was the depression and everyone needed to work and support their families. The student body President of Rollins, Nat French, also led a contingent of students that lobbied Rice to create a new and better kind of college that they could attend.

One of the first orders of business was to figure out a place that could accommodate the various operational needs of a college. A faculty supporter of Rice's at Rollins was aware of a YMCA Summer Retreat Center in Black Mountain,

NC that remained vacant during the fall, winter and spring when schools are typically in session. As Rice later recalled, “That was a wild summer. I traveled all over the East, talking to students, arguing restrainedly with parents, explaining what the college was to be when I did not know.” After traveling throughout 13 states with his son as chauffeur, Rice secured two \$5,000 contributions in a single meeting when only one had been anticipated. With \$10,000 firmly in hand, Rice made the commitment with others to launch the college. A one year lease was signed on August 24, 1933. Four ex-Rollins faculty members with enthusiastic support from ex-Rollins students were committed to opening the school two months later by mid-September. It didn’t matter that the Advisory Board of distinguished educators Rice had assembled recommended against opening, given the limited resources and minimal planning time. But Rice and his band were determined. In today’s dollars, Black Mountain College was launched with \$188,000.

What would be immediately apparent to the new students, faculty or visitors arriving in Black Mountain, was that they now found themselves in the Jim Crow South. (I will discuss this issue later.) Black Mountain was a small town then as it remains today with only four traffic lights. The YMCA Retreat Center, which continues operating today, was three miles away.

There was a specific reason why Rice could not tell prospective funders exactly what the college would do when it came to the education program. Why? Because the trustees of the college would be the faculty, and the faculty needed to first meet in order to determine what the educational program and goals would be. These decisions would be arrived at democratically and include input from students as well. While Black Mountain had a Board of Advisors, they were

nonvoting. It was the President of Swarthmore College, Rice's brother in law, who told him, "Don't have a board of trustees."

The organizing structure of the college would be more aligned with the European university model where the faculty decide all educational matters. They would be called the Board of Fellows. A single individual would be elected by the Board of Fellows to serve in the role of Rector, more like the coordinator of governmental affairs, managing the process that would alter the college's bylaws, serving a one year term. The Rector's role was not that of the conventional college president with all the standard lines of authority. When it came to matters affecting members of the entire community of faculty and students, everyone was expected to participate in the decision making process. The college community would govern themselves democratically.

A national Advisory Board would exist but without any real authority; it was mostly created as a fundraising tool whereby potential funders would understand that the college did have, and would maintain professional standards as embodied by the distinguished individuals who comprised the Advisory Board. The President of Swarthmore, John Dewey, the nation's leading proponent of progressive education, Walter Gropius, founder of Germany's Bauhaus School of Art and Craft, and later Albert Einstein were among those that volunteered their services as Advisory Board members.

The school was incorporated by six original faculty members. They established the operating framework and hired more faculty. An executive committee of the faculty with one student participating was created, and it was Nat French who was elected Black Mountain's first Student Moderator; this group would oversee the yearly budget, setting the curriculum and evaluating faculty.

Rice later wrote about several of the philosophical ideas, principles and beliefs the group had in mind when creating their own version of what a liberal arts education would be based upon. A few passages from Rice's autobiography follow:

"In other places education was part of the day and part of the man; in Black Mountain it was round the clock and all of a man. There was no escape. Three meals together, passing in the hall, meeting in classes, meeting everywhere, a man taught by the way he walked, by the sound of his voice, by every movement. This was what it was intended to be, the fulfillment of an old idea, the education of the whole man: by a whole man....I used to say, 'This is a school for giants,' I meant that every one of us should grow to the giant that it was in him to be; not someone else's giant, but his own. Few are by nature dwarfs, however many have been dwarfed. Few are by nature stupid; most of the rest are stupefied. That was what I believed. That is what I believe....Other colleges, we knew, existed as ends in themselves. (They are, says the law, "nonprofit organizations, but that law is a liar. They are as much run for profit, to their runners, as the General Electric.) Black Mountain, we said, would be a means; the end was the individual...Black Mountain must be education in democracy."

The Board of Fellows organized a student's academic program in the following way: There would be no required courses. No grades would be given in the class; however the teacher would record a grade in case the student decided to transfer later and needed a transcript. Freshman, sophomore, junior and senior class designations would not be used. Instead, a student would start in the Junior Division taking a broad range of liberal arts courses. Usually taking two years, the student would decide when he/she was ready for the two days of

evaluation, which included both oral and written examination that would be conducted by three faculty members.

Assuming the student passed, they would advance to the Senior Division whereupon the student would study a particular topic in-depth (as one's major) taking additional classes and independent tutorials. And again, the student would determine on his or her own when he or she felt ready to be tested by a group of outside evaluators in order to receive a "Certificate of Graduation" instead of the standard diploma.

The Senior Division evaluation was conducted not by Black Mountain faculty but by specialists in the particular field of knowledge the student concentrated in. Amazingly, the scholar evaluators would travel to Black Mountain to meet directly with the student. Faculty from many of the nation's top institutions including several Ivy League institutions would oversee a combination of written and oral exams.

Additionally, the corresponding expectation the Board of Fellows had for students was that they would act responsibly in all aspects of their college life. To "behave intelligently" was the guiding motto a Black Mountain student was expected to act upon, where the standard rule was that there were no rules. The matter of individual responsibility was paramount in all student relationships. One of the few rules passed by the community pertained to a "Do Not Disturb" sign that could be hung on a student's room door. It was understood that there was absolute respect for one's privacy if the sign was present.

Regarding the faculty, each member was considered a voting member of the corporate entity. They met regularly to discuss and decide on academic and nonacademic matters alike. It was also the case that the Student Moderator,

elected by the student body, would participate in their meetings as a full voting member as well. A broad range of liberal arts classes were taught each semester in subject matter covering History, Philosophy, Mathematics, Literature, foreign languages, the Social Sciences and both visual and performing arts. Faculty were free to teach whatever class they wanted to as well as employ whatever teaching style they preferred. A new catalog of classes was created and published each year.

Faculty members also took on the various administrative roles required of a functioning college that would inevitably interact with other institutions. Call it holding two jobs. During the first few years, faculty were not paid a salary but received room and board instead. The art teacher was the one exception, which I will explain later.

The spirit of the new college Rice and others had in mind was to actually be the oldest kind of college, a *communitas*, where living as a community of equals was the goal. For example, students and faculty would share all the duties required to operate the school. Although a husband and wife cook team was employed, students and faculty carried out all the other activities associated with mealtime, which occurred three times a day.

The decision making about when the cooks could get a meal off on Sunday – would it be lunch or dinner? – was decided by the community's body politic after being discussed and debated for several hours. This is an example of the decision making approach adopted by the college when it came to matters affecting everyone. Their ideal model was that of the Quaker meeting process. The goal was to reach a community consensus rather than taking up or down votes and going with the majority. But like the raucous New England town meeting process,

this governing approach in the college setting, with all the best intentions, was not effective and contributed to the school's eventual disintegration, but that is getting ahead of the story.

Black Mountain opened on September 25, 1933 with 22 students. 14 of whom had decided to leave Rollins. One student was from the local Black Mountain community. The remaining seven students arrived from the Northeast.

ACT I:

Every student had an advisor who was expected to offer guidance on whatever issue the student had. Topics dealing with personal responsibility and maturity were front and center along with academic issues. For the first two to three weeks of a semester, students could audit courses, getting to know the subject matter better and to understand the professor's teaching style. Courses could be dropped later in the semester at any time, but notifying the professor and advisor was required.

Classes were held in different locations, including classrooms, the large lobby in-side Lee Hall, the front porch of Lee Hall, or the professor's study. Music classes were held in the dining hall and art classes in other nearby buildings. Class sizes were small, between four to 10 students, with additional tutorials. A course class would meet three times a week. Students typically addressed their professors by their first name.

An innovative feature to Black Mountain's unique definition of the liberal arts college, and the feature that attracted more students throughout its 24 year existence than any other component, was the integration of art learning – applying oneself to practicing some type of art. Studying art history is not what was intended. The value of art was placed at the core of the overall learning

experience. Rice later explained, “The center of the curriculum, we said, would be art. The democratic man, we said, must be an artist. The integrity, we said, of the democratic man was the integrity of the artist, an integrity of relationship.”

How Rice found the right art teacher is a classic example of how so much of the college was created. His process was personal, creative and anything but traditional. Rice reached out to various people around the country for recommendations, including Phillip Johnson, a young architect, who the year before founded the Department of Architecture and Design at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Rice explained to Curator Johnson that he was looking for a one-of-a-kind teacher. Johnson told Rice that he was aware of a painting instructor, Joseph Albers, who had just lost his job in Germany because Adolf Hitler closed down the Bauhaus, a college of design in Berlin that sought to unify the disciplines of art and craft instead of maintaining two separate academic programs, which was the usual practice both in Europe and America. The Bauhaus philosophy of teaching valued the modern, which Hitler vehemently opposed. Rice listened to Johnson talk about and describe Joseph Albers and on the spot told Johnson to contact Albers and offer him the job at Black Mountain.

Rice later explained why he had complete confidence in making the job offer to Albers so quickly. Rice had developed his own theory of how and when to recognize a great teacher. The moment occurs when you listened to someone else talk about the person. The tone and cadence of the speaker’s voice changed; their excitement level increased as they describe the nature of the teacher’s interactions with students. Rice could hear and see the excitement and enthusiasm in Johnson’s voice, especially in his eyes regarding how Albers influenced his drawing students. Rice knew Albers was just the professor for

Black Mountain. But when Rice asked Johnson to offer Albers the job, Johnson told him there was one big problem he hadn't mentioned— Albers could not speak a word of English. Rice didn't pause a beat, he told Johnson to offer it to him anyway, a challenge that could be and was overcome. It would not be long before the Black Mountain community realized their good fortune for it was Anni Albers, Joseph's wife, who could speak some English and was an accomplished artist, a weaver, in her own right.

Recall that neither Rice nor anyone else had a blueprint for what the role of art was supposed to be at Black Mountain. It would be up to Albers to lead the way. The educational approach was much more than merely cultivating an appreciation for art. Albers defined art as encompassing "painting, writing, drawing, constructions and assemblages, weaving, music, drama, architecture, photography, typography, design, dance," and combinations of two or more of the preceding.

What Albers stressed and had his students do in his Introduction to Drawing class was to concentrate on engaging the full range of the creative artistic process. Albers called the process "a making and a doing." At the ceremony for him the day he arrived, when asked to explain what he had in mind for Black Mountain's art program, he had learned enough English to simply state, "I want to open eyes." His approach to doing that assumed that the creative process would remain a mystery, but that one needed to concentrate in what he termed, a "training of consciousness," an essential component of the artistic process.

Albers was not interested in having students go on to become fulltime artists. His teaching priority was to have students become better individuals and

citizens by learning to think on their own from having experienced a special type of art making. When making something, one had to mix components, find the right balance, and use discipline when making choices. For Albers, art was much more about how something is made rather than what the final product is. How the performance is undertaken and completed, that is the content of art in which Albers believed. He also stressed and had his students work on developing and understanding the values, the different and changing meanings associated with combining materials, surfaces, colors, textures and more. These are all the kinds of thinking issues a citizen had to weigh from Albers' perspective.

Atypical from today's higher education practice, it was a common occurrence at Black Mountain for faculty to also take classes taught by other professors. Rice took Albers' drawing class and Albers took Rice's Plato class right along with the students. These two classes generated the largest numbers of students and were recommended as essential even though not required.

Later, after Rice had been asked to leave the college, he reflected on the transformative benefits associated with infusing art throughout the learning process. "It was a creation, this integrity of the artist, a creation by him and his environment. The artist, we said, was not a competitor. He competed only with himself. His struggle was inside, not against his fellows, but against his own ignorance and clumsiness. The painting was his integrity, the score, the words of a play, and, at last, understanding, the will and the skill to do with his fellows, with the corporation, what he had done with paints and sounds: the integrity that was a relationship between himself and the corporation."

Three years later in 1936, enrollment had risen to 55 students, more than doubling. During this time period faculty still were not paid a salary other than

the art teacher, Joseph Albers. What faculty did receive was free room and board, a benefit highly valued during the depression. Now that the Albers had settled in and were pleased with being at Black Mountain, they spread the word back in Europe to an increasing number of European refugees who wanted to start a new life in America. Distinguished scholars, scientists, musicians, composers and artists joined the faculty and helped boost the schools growing reputation. For example, Ivy League schools always accepted transfer students from Black Mountain.

Fundraising and managing the school's yearly budget fell to the ever important physics professor and MIT engineer, Ted Drier, another Rollins defector. If there is an unsung hero of the college, it is Professor Drier. He was a tireless, one-person development office who inspired a few wealthy donors from the Northeast, especially the Forbes family, to make yearly financial contributions and even more for special projects. Most fortunately, Drier came from a wealthy family and used his family's connections to the college's benefit.

Educating the whole person and considering that learning while in college is a 24-hour a day undertaking, it should be expected then that outside the classroom time was valued as much if not more than classroom time. A variety of activities were organized that inspired one on one interactions with the faculty.

The Work Program was volunteer and compensation was not paid. It instilled a sense of community commitment and service. The range of activities included shoveling and transporting coal, picking apples, serving and clearing the four o'clock tea, hauling wood to the large fire place in Lee Hall, and many other chores that made the college run. Farm property was also rented on the other side of the valley where crops and animals were raised to help feed the college.

There were drama productions to rehearse for and perform in the evenings that virtually everyone at the college participated in at least once. Some kind of lecture, performance or concert occurred most evenings in Lee Hall. Saturday night was always a dress up affair for dinner with dancing and music to follow.

The Interlude Program was established and it was usually a challenge for a student the first time he or she experienced it. Given the general intensity of Black Mountain's learning and living environment, an interval was suddenly announced by the Rector each semester – the Interlude – whereby classes and work were immediately suspended for three days. Every student and teacher was responsible, that is, encouraged, to pursue something they were particularly interested in that they had not yet had the time to explore or work on. It could include leaving campus. At the end of the three days the community gathered together and everyone shared stories of how they spent their time.

Another way students and faculty spent time together were taking off-campus academic related trips. Regarding sports and athletics, touch football and baseball were organized and played. No surprise, the musically creative fielded a marching band at football games. The most consistent extracurricular activity throughout the life of the college for students as well as faculty was hiking and talking. The beautiful environment inspired a natural urge to get out and walk in nature, have a fellow community member join you, and engage in ongoing conversation. That kind of activity above all else was highly valued as productive learning time.

In 1936 the Yugoslavian writer, Louis Adamic, best known for his novel *The Native's Return*, wrote a long article in Harper's Magazine entitled "Education On A Mountain." The article brought great notice to the college but also sowed the

seeds of dissension that eventually led to significant change. Adamic initially stopped in with his wife to visit the college for two hours and ended up residing there for three months because he became so intrigued. His article focused in great detail on the college's founder and Rector, John Andrew Rice. Adamic dissected Rice's Socratic teaching methods that made him such a tough, demanding and admired professor. While unintended, Adamic also portrayed Rice as the college's ultimate leader.

As a democratically run college, there were many faculty and students who disagreed with this and did not appreciate the portrayal of Rice as a type of super-leader. Continued debate amongst the community occurred off and on for two more years regarding the positive and negative feelings concerning Rice's domineering personality style and position as Rector of the College. The Executive Committee of the Board of Fellows supported Rice so he remained as Rector.

Then, in 1938, word circulated throughout the community that Rice had had a consensual affair with a female student. This event and that his wife, Nell, continued living as a member of the college community, caused an increased level of consternation for the next two years. It reached a point where Rice took a sabbatical during the 1939-40 school year. His wife wanted nothing else to do with him. His oldest and most trusted colleagues from Rollins eventually implored him to resign, which he did but only after begging to be given a second chance to return so he could demonstrate that he was a changed man. But the willingness was not there after the previous four years of turmoil.

ACT II:

There was a consensus at the college during the early years that in order to grow enrollment and educational programs, it would be necessary to purchase land and buildings to create a permanent campus. Ted Drier's fundraising and budget management discipline enabled the college to take out a mortgage and purchase a 667 acre tract of land in 1937 where the college had been operating its farming program.

An exceedingly beautiful piece of property, at its center was Lake Eden. Previously used as a company's summer resort, there were several buildings, including two lodges, and a large dining hall with an attached porch situated around the lake. There were several other buildings that would be used for academic programs and numerous cottages in which faculty lived.

The college moved all of its operations to the new campus site in the fall semester, 1941, just prior to Pearl Harbor. Students and faculty had spent the preceding two years planning, modifying and insulating all of the buildings so they could be occupied year-round. But even more amazing, at the far end of Lake Eden facing all of the historic buildings, was a brand new three-story metal and glass structure called the Studies Building. It was a Bauhaus style design conceived of by Walter Gropius and constructed by students and faculty the year prior to moving, which was the only way the building was affordable. During the entire 1940 school year, academic classes were held in the morning at the Blue Ridge Assembly location and then everyone would pile in cars and trucks and drive over to the new campus site to build the new building. Two local residents were instrumental in helping faculty and student labor solve complex engineering and construction challenges.

Every academic year brought some new faculty to the college, which usually numbered around a dozen; they came from top institutions and graduate schools from around the country. There was never a shortage of faculty interested in teaching at Black Mountain. Several original faculty members remained as college life got underway at the new campus. Rice was gone and the last few years of a gnawing community tension were behind them. There was an optimism and excitement for the future.

While the new campus created opportunities for growth, the limited funds generated from tuition and fundraising often went into the campus building program. To remain solvent, Drier took a second mortgage on the property backed by the Forbes family. Faculty salaries remained meager and sometimes went unpaid. The farm program was invaluable because it allowed the school to achieve some level of sustainability growing food and generating other income from the property.

Events surrounding World War II stimulated a much greater awareness of the important role African Americans played in the war effort both at home and abroad. Discussion within the Black Mountain Community about how to act differently regarding segregation practices began the first year and continued into the 1940s. While everyone agreed that injustices were being committed every day, determining how the college could address the problem created another period of community challenge and change. No one had forgotten how the college decided to act in 1933, when a visiting African American faculty member ended up spending the night in the home of a local black family instead of in Lee Hall at the college, a decision that was endorsed at the time by Jack and Ruby, the

black husband and wife chefs who were considered part of the college community.

But a lot had happened since then in America. Several students and faculty believed it was time to admit students of color. In 1944 the student body voted two to one on the question of whether to admit a black student. The faculty vote was almost evenly split. While everyone acknowledged they personally supported the goal of integration, a significant number of faculty, including a number of students, feared there could be backlash from the local community ranging from violence to arson, or even boycotts of some kind. Several community-wide meeting discussions ensued following the initial votes. Strong opinions were expressed by faculty who had been at the college for a number of years; their view was that many residents living in the surrounding area were just marginally accepting of the college; they held a more cautionary, wait-and-see approach because they believed such a step could be the downfall of the college itself.

Eventually, a version of the Quaker inspired community consensus was reached after a number of exhaustive meetings. Some in the “integrate now” camp were also collaborating with associates at Howard University. Plus, the Julius Rosenwald Fund based in New York City was offering to contribute financially to Black Mountain if the college would integrate, something no other college or university in North Carolina had yet done. A gradual step solution was reached. It was decided in May 1945 that two black students would attend the upcoming and recently added Summer Institute art and music program. Still early in their careers, two acclaimed black artists, Carol Brice and Roland Hayes, would also join the Summer Institute faculty. A full time minority student was admitted

the next fall with an increasing number to follow. By 1947, the school was fully integrated, the first in North Carolina and seven years prior to the Supreme Court's *Brown vs. the Board of Education* decision.

The Summer Institute art and music program began in 1944; it became an academic and marketing success for the college. A variety of educational programs offerings attracted aspiring artists and teachers, many from New York City. When William de Kooning came to teach just for room and board, he had not yet had his first one person exhibit show. De Kooning is an example of what happened to many young art instructors and students who attended the Summer Institutes. He went on to become one of the most important modern artists of the twentieth century whose work is collected by major museums around the world. His wife, Elaine, accompanied him. She wrote later that they could not spare the extra dollar for the cost of a pillow to share on the overnight train ride from New York. And Elaine, too, went on to become a major artist in her own right. It was at the Summer Institutes where she began to take her first art courses from Albers.

It is worthwhile to note why Joseph Albers asked William de Kooning to come and teach. It was because de Kooning's style of art was totally different from Albers. And while Albers did not much care for it, he recognized that de Kooning's approach made for just the right counter balance to Albers's style. This is an example of the special type of creative and experimental tension regarding the overall learning environment that was cultivated at the college throughout its existence. Respecting traditional practices while experimenting with new ideas.

Buckminster Fuller, known later around the world as the "planet's friendliest genius," was another example of the types of innovative and

experimental teachers Black Mountain invited to teach at the Summer Institutes. A visionary and innovative architect and engineer, “Bucky”, as he was known, worked with students to build his first geodesic dome at Black Mountain.

John Cage, the musical composer, and Merce Cunningham, the modern dancer, both came to Black Mountain from New York as Summer Institute teachers. Cunningham formed the Merce Cunningham Dance Troupe while at Black Mountain, which went on to become one of most groundbreaking and influential modern dance company’s performing around the globe.

The collaborative art projects Cage and Cunningham created and performed while at Black Mountain and for the next 60 years influenced the development of several art mediums in America and abroad, even right here in Cincinnati. One particular innovative and memorable performance occurred during the summer of 1944. No one at the time could foresee what the eventual ripple effect would be. John Cage was interested in experimenting with relationships between different art mediums when they were performed simultaneously. Cage called it “purposeless purposefulness.”

The event had the kind of impact on the audience whereby five different people who attended described contrasting experiences whether right after the performance or years later. Following is from the diary of author, Francine du Plessix Gray, who at the time was a student:

“At 8:30 tonight John Cage mounted a stepladder and until 10:30, he talked of the relation of music to Zen Buddhism, while a movie was shown, dogs barked, Merce (Cunningham) danced, a prepared piano was played, whistles blew, babies screamed, coffee was served by four boys dressed in white, and Edith Piaf records were played double-speed on a turn-of-the-century machine. At 10:30 the recital

ended and Cage grinned while (the poet Charles) Olson talked to him again about Zen Buddhism, (the composer) Stefan Wolpe bitched, two boys in white waltzed together, (David) Tudor played the piano, and the professors' wives licked popsicles."

I only wish that I had the time tonight for us to stage our own Literary Club Happening. I can hear the voices and music and political philosophy debates emanating from several individuals from this august body, never shy about expressing their collective opinions.

Let the final note of this John Cage piece pay tribute to Cincinnati's own Carl Solway, the founder of the Carl Solway Gallery near Findley Market. I am certain many of you know Carl and are familiar with his art gallery. Carl met John Cage in 1968, and it was Carl who inspired Cage to begin creating visual works of art that did achieve new artistic success. In fact, you can still see for another few weeks a current exhibit at the Cincinnati Art Museum, "Not in New York: Carl Solway and Cincinnati" that includes pieces by John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Joseph Albers, William de Kooning and Buckminster Fuller.

Another offshoot from The Happening and the collaborations between John Cage and Merce Cunningham occurred decades later here in Cincinnati. It is the Music Now program put on at Music Hall. Local boy, University of Cincinnati DAAP School graduate, and co-founder with his brother of the world traveling band, The National, Bryce Dessner took up music for the first time as a young kid while attending a camp in North Carolina located nearby the historic Black Mountain College campus. Dessner went on to study the artistic collaborations between Cage and Cunningham. The 10-year old Music Now program is focused

on experimentation by blending different forms of art and music in one time only performances.

And let me briefly add that in 2014 it was a New York Times article titled “Black Mountain Songs – A Youthful Tribute to a Fallen Friend,” directed by Bryce Dessner and performed by the Brooklyn Youth Chorus in New York that first intrigued me with the idea of giving this first paper about Black Mountain College because there was at least some thread connecting it to Cincinnati.

So back to the Black Mountain story. I have chosen not to spend time recounting the almost yearly internal political struggles that played out between mostly faculty members, but always involving students, over what different factions thought needed to be emphasized or changed about the college. Regrettably, a number of high quality, enthusiastic and well-meaning faculty eventually left on their own accord, or were dismissed in some kind of power play.

At the conclusion of World War II in 1945, there were 45 students enrolled; only 25% of them were male, which was understandable given the number of young men serving in the military. It was the creation of the GI Bill of Rights that proved a shot in the arm for Black Mountain’s enrollment, which also translated into an expanded number of academic programs. By 1947, the number of students had doubled to 90 and 50% of the student body were males taking advantage of the federal financial aid program.

A few students who enrolled during this period and went on to distinguished careers and universal recognition include Arthur Penn, the movie director and producer, Robert Rauschenberg, a ground breaking painter and sculptor renown the world over, Kenneth Noland, a local student from Asheville

who went on to be a highly acclaimed painter whose works are displayed in museums around the globe. The same can also be said for Cy Twombly and several others who came to Black Mountain as curious American youth in their late teens or early twenties, interested in exploring how Black Mountain's special kind of educational environment could help them develop skills and thought processes to last them a lifetime. Rauschenberg said that he thought of the problems Albers gave him every day of his life, along with the disciplined approach that was called for when working at one's trade.

Throughout the 1940's a steady momentum at the college had been achieved, an increase in enrollment occurred beginning in 1945. The nationally recognized Summer Arts programs attracted leading academics and artists. Financially, the college was able to pay its bills between 1945 through 1949 but as from the outset, every year was a question mark and brought economic hardship of one kind or another.

When the GI Bill of Rights financial support program began to phase out in 1949, Black Mountain's systemic economic pressures reemerged. Enrollment immediately dropped in half to 50 students. A new and deeper round of soul searching by the college community began. It asked: How best to sustain the college financially for the long-term? Several faculty who were getting on in age and had made sacrifices for well over a decade were especially interested in figuring out a solution in which they could be confident. Two of these individuals were founding members – Joseph Albers, the arts leader and current Rector of the college, and Ted Drier, the physics professor, Treasurer and fundraiser extraordinaire.

Albers and Drier proposed to the community that the college modify the curriculum, essentially reducing some of the liberal arts disciplines and focusing resources on expanding academic and Summer Institute programs in arts and music. One can imagine how strenuous the many debates must have been in the small community of students and faculty with so much personally at stake, not to mention living in and around each other 24 hours a day.

This time, the Quaker consensus was unachievable. The resulting rancor over the proposal created two opposed camps – old faculty members versus new faculty members, with the majority of the students siding with the new faculty, which was for preserving and maintaining the original, broad based liberal arts program. Although no one knew it at the time or forecasted what the fallout would be, this community decision and the circumstances surrounding it would prove to be a significant turning point. The outcome in this case spelled doom for the college, but it would take another seven years for the events and their consequences to bring the college to a close.

What occurred is this: the contingent of new faculty became fearful that Ted Drier, in his role as the college's treasurer, would take steps on his own to close the college over the looming financial problems even though Drier had not indicated that he would pursue such a course of action. The Board of Fellows Executive Committee, comprised of a majority of new faculty, asked Drier to submit his resignation. Tension between individuals across the small campus was fierce. With the majority of the community not inclined to approve the Albers/Drier alternative plan for regaining college's momentum and financial stability, Drier resigned.

What wasn't anticipated or known by the group of new faculty that wanted Drier to leave was that Yale University was at the same time courting Joseph Albers to come to Yale to lead the development of a new Department of Design. The significant offer from Yale and the longstanding friendship, indebtedness and loyalty both Joseph and Anni Albers had towards Ted Drier and his wife, led Albers to submit his resignation in protest over the treatment of Ted Drier. The departure of these two founding members of the college, one who had defined its arts mission and the other who kept the lights on and the dining hall open for business, were now gone. This brings to a close Act Two of Black Mountain's story.

Act III:

As the college entered its final and third act, there was only one member of the original community, Nell Rice, John Andrew Rice's ex-wife, who still remained. She alone possessed the collective memory of the original spirit of the place. It is also worth noting that Black Mountain was now a fully American college, in the sense that the faculty no longer included any of the European trained academicians who prided themselves on maintaining a certain discipline to both academic and social life.

In each of the three phases of Black Mountain's existence, certain individuals stood out. In its last seven years, key events centered on Charles Olson, a highly acclaimed poet who first arrived at the college as a poetry teacher during the Summer Institutes in the 1940s. He became a full-time faculty member and the new Rector, replacing Albers.

Charles Olson and several new faculty members put their own stamp on what the college would become during this final phase. As in the past, individual

members of the community would define and exert their personal beliefs and style on how the college themes would operate. As a recognized poet, Olson, brought a new emphasis on writing and its relationship to the arts. He hired poets Robert Creeley and Robert Duncan to join the faculty. Although respected, Creeley and Duncan were poets who were considered outside the mainstream, mavericks, critical of how traditional poetry was taught and published in mainstream colleges and universities.

The freedom to experiment and create, including Olson's academic and financial support, enabled the two poets to establish *The Black Mountain Review*, a journal of writing and poetry that quickly gained national prominence by publishing the work of new writers well beyond the field of poetry.

Although the new writing program achieved high praise throughout literary circles, it had a negligible effect on student enrollment. By 1953 the student body count was down to 35, then 15, nine, and finally five in 1956. In the years immediately following Albers and Drier's departure and throughout the early 1950s, the faculty and students continued to review and debate the educational structure of the college. Proposals were made to establish traditional course requirements associated with receiving a degree. Even in the face of a shrinking number of students, faculty and resources, when new proposals were brought forward for a vote, the majority consensus, mistakenly, in my opinion, would continue to stick with the founding tenets of the school. There was never any modification of the original freedoms. Therefore, faculty members who were more interested in pursuing traditional institutional practices as a way to boost enrollment and sustain the college financially decided on their own to leave.

The mood of the country had decidedly changed from the economic worries associated with the depression era and World War II to the Eisenhower era with greater stability, prosperity, optimism, along with a more conservative political culture.

On the financial front, there were fewer wealthy individuals and foundations who were interested in funding such a non-traditional, do your own thing, style of college as Black Mountain, especially one located in the hinterlands of the rural south with dwindling student enrollment. And with the departure of Ted Drier, there was no one who was either interested or effective at external fundraising, nor skilled at performing the types of creative and complex financial transactions that were necessary in order to keep the college scrimping by as Drier had done so adroitly during the first few years of Black Mountain's existence.

However, even in the face of these threatening realities, the original spirit for what the college stood for never waned. What helped keep the year-round community optimistic and motivated during this period were the well-attended Summer Institute programs. Black Mountain became a counterpoint to the growing American culture of conservatism. It was exactly these principles of freedom of expression that attracted enough young teacher and student artist types that continued to give hope to the shrinking college. But unfortunately, Cage, Cunningham, and others were becoming more popular so they could no longer commit their time to Black Mountain. Moreover, the college's economic constraints contributed to the suspension of the Summer Institute program in 1953.

So what to do next? The success of the Summer Institute inspired the college's new leader to propose an overhaul of Black Mountain's yearlong academic program by having students concentrate in one or two fields of study instead of several. Olson developed a learning model that actually expanded the Black Mountain program into four different academic institutes located around the country where students and faculty would concentrate on a particular subject matter discipline while taking two intensive course per semester. The arts, social sciences and the formal sciences would be the organizing themes. Black Mountain would be the arts center and hold its programs in the summer time.

However, by the time Olson brought forward this reorganizing plan, the college was too far in debt and lacked enough resources to reprogram and market itself. This was doubly disappointing because leading universities and academicians from around the country expressed genuine interest when Olson contacted them about establishing a four site, Black Mountain national education center as a new higher education model.

Throughout 1953 and 1954 calls and pleas for donations were sent to friends of the college and previous donors. Nell Rice even made a direct solicitation to the Forbes family representative who had worked with Ted Drier for 15 years making contributions. This had the unintended consequence of causing the Forbes family to instead call in the full mortgage payment on what was still owed on the Lake Eden property. While the payment was eventually made at the last possible moment, it took everything the college could attract from other supporters to hold on to the property.

Beyond the financial, the college's declining state was visually apparent. Faculty and students during this period lacked the interest to participate in a work

program and operate the farm. Available resources were insufficient to operate the farm at a level that would generate harvests and additional income. The resulting conditions were sorrowful. Dairy and beef cows died due to lack of care. The remaining cows and other animals were then sold.

The dwindling resources during the final years caused the college kitchen to close. Faculty and students forged on their own in small groups. A few community members were actually caught stealing food from the local A&P grocery store. In the winter of 1956, the college lacked enough money to buy coal to heat the buildings so classes and college operations were suspended for three months during the winter.

However, Olson and the small nucleus of faculty and students that remained did not give up easily. Individual tutorials rather than classes being held became the educational norm. Teachers and students remained dedicated to their particular subject matter passion. As historic documents explain, there was so much daily commenting between students and teachers on each other's work during this period that it was hard to tell the difference between the two roles. Those who were present, looking back, believe some of the most creative work to ever come out of the college occurred in the last two years. The sculptor Richard Chamberlin, the painter Franz Kline, and the poet Robert, all important artists, are just three examples of the kind of students who were at Black Mountain toward its end.

The democratic community process also declined, leaving much of the decision making up to Olson, whose personality many described as a force of nature. Tuition income was minimal so all Olson could do to pay essential bills was to sell a stand of timber on the property as well as parcels of land, which he

started doing slowly. In the spring of 1956 the college leased its main campus buildings to a Christian summer camp as a way to generate new income but it was too little, too late.

The 1956 fall semester actually brought a few new students to the campus, however the remaining faculty who were committed to teach was down to two. There were other looming legal issues on Olson's mind (which never actually materialized) related to social practices occurring at the school that had been reported to the local authorities – infidelity and homosexuality. Facing these and other pressures, Olson and another faculty member sat in a café in downtown Asheville one morning reviewing the limited prospects and options regarding the future. They decided the time had come to close the college and gave everyone 30 days to leave. Olson would remain on the property for six months with his previous student and now wife and child to resolve all the outstanding matters associated with the various properties and facilities.

In March of 1957 a court order was submitted to the college to permanently cease operations, which it did. The remaining property and buildings and the college in its entirety were sold to Camp Rockmont, the Christian camp that continues to operate to the present. The proceeds from the sale of the land and all other property paid off several faculty who had since departed but who were owed retirement payments. These were eventually paid in full with the books finally being closed out on the college in 1962.

But that's not quite the right note to end on from my perspective. Instead, let's listen to what Olson and two other teachers had to say about the final days: "...there is no end to the Black Mountain story....her flag flies....the seeds live inside you..."

For those of you who might be traveling near Columbus, Ohio between now and January 1st, and if you are so inclined, the “Leap Before You Look” exhibition will be on view at the Wexner Center for the Arts until then. And if you are interested enough to want to make a special trip, consider going online to review the many educational programs, performances, lectures and related activities associated with the show.

You have been enormously patient listening for this long. I apologize for keeping you. There are just two final aspects of the Black Mountain story I wish to share. The first is a summary comment regarding the mistakes individuals made. The problems and failure had more to do with personalities and inflexibility than with many of the ideas set forth at the beginning. Please know that I do not hold up all of Black Mountain’s history as the model institution for others to emulate today. Rather, there were educational ideas experimented with there, consider them as ingredients, that when mixed together with just the right balance, could create a positive outcome for students when it comes to teaching critical thinking skills, personal maturity, responsibility, discipline, lifelong learning, and putting forth an effort to be a contributing citizen. The achievements and personal recollections of the students that both attended and graduated from the college bears this out.

John Andrew Rice himself knew even in 1942 when the college still existed that he would do some things differently if he were starting over again. He more than anyone understood how continuous strife can take a toll on members of the community. Rice stated:

“If I were listing requirements for another Black Mountain, first would be at least four couples held together by resolute love, by love in which the conflicts

were resolved into equality. There would be no requirement as to age, only that they should be really one, two equal halves that were one. I used to say, when Black Mountain was only a small thought, that I should never have in a college or teacher anyone who was unhappily married or unhappily unmarried. We had both kinds, but, in all the six years, only one couple who met the test; and they, a year after I left, were required to leave.”

Now the final lesson of the evening. It comes to us from Nat French. The Black Mountain learning goal he shared with me back in 1975 is one that I had not run across. And when in Asheville last year visiting the Black Mountain College Museum and Arts Center, I showed the executive director what Nat had written and she was thrilled. She immediately asked for a copy so they could enter it into their historical archives. I found the documentation in the book I am holding in my hand. It is Martin Duberman’s history of Black Mountain College published in 1972.

After I started graduate school and began to spend more time with Nat and Edie in Amherst, Mass, we would sometimes talk about Nat’s experiences at Black Mountain. I remember asking him what his education at Black Mountain had meant to him. In response, he asked me for the copy of my Duberman book that was sitting close by. I handed it to him and he inscribed the following, which I had completely forgotten about until engaging this Literary Club paper, so again, thank you fellow Literary Club members. Nat writes, “Happy to say here that this man, Scott, has a built-in respect for all men – guess he knows that loving one’s brother asks that one loves “the unlovable”! And this was central to Black Mountain’s concern!”

Therein lies the story and meaning behind the title of tonight's paper, "Loving the Unlovable." While Nat French was generous in his sizing up my abilities at the young age of 22, I wish I could say I had followed his and Black Mountain's principle more than I have in the years since. But I feel more than a little fortunate that the Literary Club writing process caused me to rediscover it, especially now, in a time of our nation that generates too much friction and adversarial, disagreeable and strained relationships between individuals, groups of Americans, not to mention, political parties or the mutually destructive conflicts that seem to be increasing between different cultures and countries around the world. Now more than ever is such an educational idea and belief important to keep in mind, close to the heart, and to think, muster the will, and act on in one's words and deeds. For myself, I will continue to give it the good old college try, as they say, and hope you will, too. And with that, class is dismissed.

Submitted by: Andy Scott

October 3, 2016

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