

NARRATIVE TEXTS

Christia V. Daniels Adair, Teacher and Activist, 1893-1989

In the Daniels household, it was an “unwritten law” that the children would gather round the dinner table and listen to their father talk about the events of the day, about “politicians and law enforcements.” It was an “unwritten law” their daughter would obey through a lifetime of caring very much about “politicians and law enforcements.” After graduation from Prairie View Normal (now Prairie View A&M) and several years of teaching, Christia Daniels married Elbert Adair, a Missouri Pacific brakeman, and the couple settled in Kingsville. There she learned that a local gambling house was employing teenage boys. To get the district attorney to close down the operation, Mrs. Adair had to organize white and black women to work together. Then she united Negro women with white women to acquire the vote in 1919, only to learn that she still could not vote in the primary because political parties were, at that time, white only.



True to Lincoln, Christia Adair was a Republican. One day in 1920, her husband phoned that his train was bringing Republican candidate Warren G. Harding to Kingsville. Having met the train many times, she knew exactly where to align her Sunday school class for a front-row view. The candidate appeared—but reached over her children to shake the white children’s hands! It was at that moment that Christia Adair became a Democrat!

In 1925, when the couple moved to Houston, Mrs. Adair joined all her favorite religious and civic groups and worked energetically with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. In 1944, after the Houston NAACP won a case opposing all-white party organizations, she was among the first black women to vote in the primary. As Executive Secretary, she led campaigns to achieve minority access to public schools, libraries, transportation, and hospitals in the city. When the NAACP came under fire in the 1950s, she refused to turn over their membership roles, enduring over two years of persecution until her position was upheld by the Supreme Court.

A voter to the end, in November of 1989, before her death in December, Christia Adair cast her final vote. Instead of mailing in her ballot as was allowed, she asked some friends to carry her from her bed to the polls so that she could vote in person.

Quotations

When (Harding) came out, he was facing my children, and do you know what he did? He reached over their heads to shake hands with some white children behind them. I was offended and insulted at what he did to my children.

I told the Negro women who were working with me, I said “We just can’t do it alone, and white women who have sons and daughters ought to be interested in this project.”

Back in 1918 Negroes could not vote and women could not vote either. The white women were trying to help get a bill passed in the legislature where women could vote. I said to the Negro women, “I don’t know if we can use it now or not, but if there’s a chance, I want to say we helped make it.”

Photo

Willie Lee Gay and Texas Woman’s University.

Sources

Note: Some sources give her death as 1990. She died December 31, 1989; her memorial service was held January 7, 1990. Bernstein, Ellen, “Christia Daniels Adair’s lifelong crusade for black civil rights in Texas began in Kingsville.” *Corpus Christi Caller Times*, Sunday, February 21, 1999, Section H. p. 1 ff.; Davis, Alecia, “Christia V. Adair: A Servant of Humanity.” *Texas Historian*, September 1977, vol. xxxviii, no. 1, pp. 1 ff. ; *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. “Adair, Christia V. Daniels,” <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/AA/fad19.html> (October 10, 2005); Rogers, Mary Beth, et al, *We Can Fly: Stories of Katherine Stinson and Other Gutsy Texas Women*. (Austin: Ellen C. Temple, 1983), pp. 113-25; Winegarten, Ruthe, *Black Texas Women: 150 Years of Trial and Triumph* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), pp. 244-46.