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What Happened at Sacramento

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FOUNDATION GRANTS TO WOMEN'S GROUPS
Marjorie Fine Knowles

The foundation world has been troubled and unsettled by the women's movement, which seems to have presented a unique funding problem for foundation executives, who are overwhelmingly male. It is possible to pinpoint some reasons for the problem. Unlike other groups, easily identifiable by race, ethnicity, and often geographic concentration, women are "so ubiquitous." They are found in all races, all educational levels and all socioeconomic groups. The issues women's groups present when they come to seek foundation grants often open up areas for discussion that literally strike uncomfortably close to home; they are often challenging cherished assumptions about the patriarchal family and the educational system which nourishes it. They come seeking funding for a new academic discipline called "women's studies"; or for support of litigation to abolish the sex discrimination which, foundation executives are shocked to discover, pervades our legal system.

Outraged groups of mothers can document, and want to challenge, the sexism in textbooks and children's television. Women of all races want support to develop new educational and employment opportunities, designed to serve the real needs they have, as they perceive them.

This article will attempt to review the response of some of the foundations to these requests. It is not a complete or systematic review of all foundation grants in the area, but is based on responses to letters I have written to approximately fifty foundations, including many major and numerous small ones. Project descriptions are taken directly from materials provided by the foundation; additional information about a project may be obtained from the foundation. The names of people within the foundation world who are willing to advise women seeking foundation funding are included along with their foundation listings. I am apologetic for the informal nature of this sample (made necessary by the complete lack of funds!), but offer it in the belief that most foundation activities have always been relatively mysterious to the outsider, and that this information, therefore, may be useful as a starter. After a review of grants awarded, I will briefly sketch the sources of information available to the person seeking foundation grants, and share some thoughts on the future course of the relationship between the women's movement and the foundation world.

I had originally intended to limit this list to grants made to assist women to work, individually or in groups, on projects designed and

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SACRAMENTO (continued)

After a multi-media presentation Friday night, the conference opened officially Saturday morning with doughnuts and coffee and three addresses by Joan Hoff Wilson and Kirsten Amundsen of Sacramento and Florence Howe of SUNY/Old Westbury. Wilson analyzed the sexism inherent in the attitudes of three groups which might (unfortunately) help shape the future: the "old" radical male left, male social scientists, and male writers of science fiction. Women and women's studies, she suggested, could provide alternatives to the sexist visions of such men, through the creation of a female culture with female values, free of the confrontation politics that marked the movements of the sixties. Amundsen spoke of the pain and conflict that many of those in the women's movement have suffered as their commitment to feminism has grown. She asked, Was it worth it? and answered in the affirmative with statistics suggesting the educative value of women's studies in changing women's attitude about themselves, their capacities and expectations; and with economic data showing how far we still have to go. We cannot turn back now, she said; we cannot reject the discoveries about ourselves and our status that we have made; the revolution in our minds is irreversible. Howe described the work of re-education that must be done in the public schools, and reminded us that women's studies, far from being a purely academic endeavor, is and must be inherently political: it must live or die with the women's movement itself, and it is openly committed to changing people's lives.

The workshops that occupied the mornings and afternoons of the next three days were planned primarily to deal with tactics and strategies for organizing programs—funding, control, leadership, structure, community education; and with feminist teaching—curriculum, materials, classroom techniques. Many of these workshops, unfortunately, were overcrowded. Some 200 women, for example, came to the workshop on Feminist Teaching: Developing Courses to Create a Female Culture, and spent valuable time deciding how to handle the overflow. (The crowding could have been anticipated, since there were only five workshops scheduled concurrently at any one time.) Finally this group broke down into smaller working units on the basis of area of interest—not entirely a satisfactory solution for those who wanted to hear about other fields, and not always curative of the size problem: there were fifty at the "small" group discussion on literature. Still, these workshops gave us a chance to add to our bibliographies and our stock of ideas about teaching and organizing, to renew old contacts and make new ones, to air our frustrations and share our successes.

The conference planners had also included workshops on a Feminist View of the Class Struggle, and on Ethnic Studies and Women's Studies: Cooperation or Conflict. And for Sunday they had scheduled a Gay Women's Caucus and an Ethnic Women's Caucus. The large and well-organized contingent from San Diego, together with women from San Jose State and San Francisco State, organized in addition an ongoing session on Heterosexual Bias within the women's movement, and initiated a workshop on Racism in the Women's Movement, retitled by the conference planners A Feminist Perspective on Race. It was participants of these workshops and caucuses who produced the memorandum excerpted earlier, accusing the conference planners of heterosexual bias, class bias, and racism, ostensibly manifested in some of the following ways: (1) the original omission of workshops on lesbianism and heterosexual bias and the lack of social events except as planned by lesbian women on their own; (2) the requirement of a $4.00 registration fee for all participants rather than a sliding fee based on capacity to pay (the San Diego women refused to pay the fee, offering instead $25.00 for the group of twenty-six); insufficient free housing and inadequate provision of food for those who could not afford three days of restau-

rant prices; inadequate childcare facilities; and (3) too limited an effort to contact Third World women about the conference; a failure to integrate an analysis of racism into all aspects of the conference; the shift in focus implied in the change of name of the panel on racism; and the use of the term "Ethnic Women" instead of "Third World Women" in the program.

Not surprisingly, the conference planners reacted with pain and righteous indignation. They had, after all, planned workshops on all of these issues in advance, except the one on Heterosexual Bias; lesbians had been included in planning the program; the conference was well-attended by Third World women; and as to food, registration fees, and daycare, their own resources at the University were hardly unlimited.

But all these charges and countercharges may be viewed as symptoms of a deeper polarization in ideology. The battle lines had been drawn long before the conference, for the divisions which emerged there are those in the movement itself. The sorest of divisions are not, I think, between middle-class and working-class women, nor between Third World and white women, nor even between lesbian and straight women. These differences, except perhaps for sexuality, are determined by birth rather than by choice: one does not choose one's race or class. They must be acknowledged and explored, and their implications for the feminist movement understood. But because the differences themselves are incontrovertible—social fact rather than ideological construct—we must and often do accept them and examine them without the Sturm und Drang, the atmosphere of charge and countercharge, the personal vindictiveness and personal defensiveness, of grander ideological confrontations.

The deepest rift at the conference, and in the movement itself, is between the "socialist feminists" and the "cultural feminists," or, as conference lingo finally put it, between "Marxists" and "Matriarchs." There are lesbian women and straight women, Third World and white women, working-class and middle-class women in both camps. The socialist feminists, at their best, urge us to remember that a feminist analysis cannot ignore the oppressive dynamic of class, racism, sexism, capitalism, imperialism, and remind us to take account of struggles of national liberation in countries other than our own. The cultural feminists, at their best, urge the creation of a culture based on female talent, productivity, and value—in the arts, in myth, in historical interpretation, in the evolution of more humane life styles based on cooperation rather than male competitiveness. The cultural feminists see in the socialist feminists an unhealthy adherence to "male" analysis and "male" tactics, and a tendency to dwell on issues that divide women rather than unite them against the common enemy—men. The Marxists see in the Matriarchs a squishy tendency to retreat from the arena of political struggle into the hip safety of "doing your own thing." At their worst, the cultural feminists red bait; at their worst, the Marxists lay guilt trips about working-class consciousness and middle-class elitism on those who diverge from their views—and on themselves. There was plenty of the best and worst from both groups at the conference.

The two camps differ also on the desirability of confrontation itself; the Marxists welcome it, the cultural feminists wish that it would go away. Wilson's opening speech was, on one level, an attempt to forestall the confrontation she knew was coming. It was a defensive offense, which the San Diego contingent correctly interpreted as an attack on their politics, and an anticipation of their strategy—to place two or more women in each of the workshops to guide the discussion along "politically correct" lines: that is, to force the acknowledgment and discussion of differences in the areas of class, race, and sexuality—not in "society" in the abstract, but within the movement and at the conference itself. In a post-

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script to her speech, written after the conference had concluded, Wilson accuses these women of manipulating and controlling the workshops in an undemocratic, underhanded, and authoritarian way, rather than simply "facilitating" them. There is truth too in this charge; many of the women at the conference were never aware of the San Diego coalition's effort to pack and channel the sessions, and to that extent they were indeed the victims of manipulation.

Yet this group did provide a political analysis that might otherwise have been absent; a more democratic and more broadly-based planning procedure for the whole conference might have avoided the manipulation. Perhaps future conferences which are clearly regional in scope should be organized by a number of schools in the area. But no amount of careful planning will heal the deepest of ideological rifts within the movement—those choices that determine where we direct our energies and how we live our lives.

By the time Robin Morgan spoke on Saturday night, emotions were running high. An exponent of cultural feminism, Morgan envisioned completely autonomous women's studies programs, taught, run, and attended solely by women. She had frightened men out of their own classes, she said, by promising to give the women an automatic pass; the men, a grade on merit (an ironic smile) or an automatic F; she required no work from the women; from the men, a sixty-page paper and the establishment of a childcare center. Morgan attacked the "Marxists" directly; Marxism was useless as an approach to the problems of women, she asserted, and class analysis irrelevant and disruptive to the development of a women's movement. Catcalls and boos, whistles and cheers greeted her remarks.

This analysis, of course, is an oversimplification of the conflicts at the conference. There were other divisions along other lines. The separatists (some Marxists in the camp along with the cultural feminists) clashed with those who prefer not to give up on men entirely and who would prefer to see women's studies courses dispersed throughout the curriculum rather than centralized and perhaps isolated in a vacuum of our own making. Those who view courses and scholarly research in women's studies as valid contributions to the feminist struggle, and who see women's studies programs as important formulators of movement theory, clashed with those who view academic programs as inevitably middle class, elitist, and "academic" in the pejorative sense, and who argue that theory can emerge only out of active political struggle—preferably in an arena other than academia.

This latter clash came into sharpest focus Sunday night, when Rita Mae Brown spoke. Her message, and that of a succession of commentators afterward, was essentially a putdown of the "academics," an expression of the "off the campuses and into the streets" frame of mind. Then Tillie Olsen stood up, and questioned this implicit glorification of oppression and ignorance; herself a working-class woman, she said that the speakers were forgetting that women's studies could give something we all need—knowledge. Again, cheers and whistles, catcalls and boos.

At the request of the Sacramento women, Florence Howe chaired the last formal session. A succession of women came to the microphone to give their reactions to the conference: criticism, from some; gratitude for the hard work of the conference planners from others; pleas for the usefulness of both major ideologies within the movement as a whole. There was one tense moment when Joan Wilson was asked to answer the charges in the memorandum; some of the antagonisms had become personalized. But if tense, the session was also cathartic, and a mood of dialogue carried over into the final discussion in the afternoon, under the trees.

And what of those—probably, after all, the majority—who came to the conference unaligned with either of the major political camps? What did they take away? Sadly, some left with a pox on both houses. "To hell with all this," one woman said. "I'm going home to work on my film." Many left with a mixture of weariness, frustration, pain, ambivalence, and a curious optimism. The weariness and pain and frustration arose from a sense that, no, we could not, with good will and a smile, heal the deep divergences between us, nor synthesize them in some glorious feminist utopia. Mutual tolerance is necessary, but it has its limitations. The ambivalence was for the content of the divergences themselves: the lines had been too clearly drawn to ignore, but how could one commit oneself finally to either camp? Yet a false objectivity can lead to impotence, and fence-sitting is uncomfortable. Still, the conference forced us to reassess—and to keep reassessing—our own attitudes and our own work; sometimes we get so bogged down with the details of teaching and the day-to-day headaches of organizing and running our own programs that we lose sight of the larger issues.

And the optimism? It came from the conviction that the movement—in spite of the polarization and the pain—is very much alive. Feminism will survive in the 1970's, but the shape of its survival is still a question-mark.

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