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GRASS ROOTS WOMEN'S STUDIES:
SOUTHERN MISSOURI

by Betty Burnett

[With this article, we begin a series of reports written by Contributing Editors, responsible for particular regions they have chosen to cover. Additions, corrections and other remarks responding to this report will be welcome. If you are interested in becoming a Contributing Editor—and writing such a report—see the Spring 1975 Women's Studies Newsletter.]

Missouri is a conservative state, and southern Missouri is its most conservative area. The ERA has been defeated twice, and mainly through the efforts of women. Last spring during the ERA campaign, a lot of bad feeling was aroused and a lot of hysterical talk was heard. People are still afraid of "women's" anything.

Southern Missouri (south of the Missouri River or I-70) is mainly small town rural, but without the large wealthy farms of northern Missouri and with large, chronically depressed areas. In several Ozark counties over one-third of the population lives below the poverty level and the median school years completed ranges between eight and nine. Literacy programs and vocational training have priority over women's studies.

The largest city in southern Missouri is Springfield (pop. 120,000). There are 15 college level schools in the area: an extension of the University of Missouri, three state universities, one state college, three district junior colleges and seven small private colleges, six of which are church-affiliated. Fundamentalist religion is very influential in this region, and three of the four fundamentalist schools are determined to hold on to tradition. The fourth, Evangel College, is the most liberal and most receptive to change. Its women—while not feminists in a NOW sense—are aware of women's potential and importance; they are questioning roles, values and traditions in a quiet, deliberate way. Twila Edwards actively crusades on the Evangel campus and in the fundamentalist community for equality in social relationships, especially in marriage.

In general, the administrators at state colleges are not supportive of women's studies because, they say, not enough faculty and students are interested, not enough money is available (no one can afford to expand right now), and they don't feel they can

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PLANNING A NATIONAL WOMEN'S STUDIES ASSOCIATION

by Elsa Greene and Elaine Reuben

On Saturday, March 20, thirty women came together in Philadelphia to begin laying the groundwork for a National Women's Studies Association and to plan for a national founding convention at which the Association will be launched. After two days of intense and high energy discussion, the group agreed in principle on a working paper which proposes a shape for the Association; they also created and approved an outline for a three-day, representational convention to be held in mid-November at San Jose State University.

In response to a proposal for a nation-wide conference on women's studies initiated by women at San Jose State in the summer of 1975, the Ford Foundation offered to fund a national planning meeting at the University of Pennsylvania. As San Jose had asked, the original grant was meant to cover costs for "six or seven" regional representatives. However, the conveners of the meeting—Marilyn Fleener and Sybil Weir of San Jose; Elsa Greene and Eileen Warburton of Pennsylvania—decided to go back to Ford for enough money so that 30 representatives could attend. Greene's letter to the Foundation explained that to provide sufficiently varied regional representation and to include some women who are directly in control of national women's studies resources, it would be necessary to assemble "ten predesignated [regional] representatives, plus ten additional representatives to be selected [by lot] from among nominees submitted by interested programs in each geographical area," plus ten representatives-at-large, e.g., women's studies journal editors, officers of funding agencies and two of the meeting conveners. The letter continued: "This design...will ensure that planning for the nation-wide meeting will be truly national from its inception. It will also establish our commitment to democratic process—a commitment which is basic to the ideals of those developing women's studies programs across the country."

Ford appropriated additional money and the conveners proceeded, with some trepidation, to implement their proposal. Eileen Warburton made up ten regions by drawing lines on a map so that approximately 15 programs would be included in

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please every "minority group" that comes down the pike. I was told that women's studies is "trendy" and "faddish" and that little "real" scholarship was going on in the field.

In preparing this report, I contacted as many schools as I could. By mail I got a poor response—45% of the colleges replied and only 20% of the high schools. But the in-person interviews were encouraging: the women I talked to were very enthusiastic about women's studies. After showing an initial hostility, all the males interviewed became sympathetic to women's studies—interestingly enough, because they had experienced sexism as children, and they all felt that they hadn't been "masculine enough." They have also watched their sons struggle with the same problems and really want to end sexism because it hurts men. Because of this emotional commitment (and some men were very emotional), I believe changes are coming about—perhaps slowly, but they are coming. As for women's studies:

University of Missouri-Rolla (5000 students) offers noncredit courses "that deal with aspects of women in our new society." UMR (it used to be Missouri School of the Mines) is still predominantly male and engineering-oriented, but some faculty members are agitating for women's studies, specifically to study women in science and engineering.

Southeast Missouri State University, Cape Girardeau (9000 students) offers Problems of Women in Society as a freshman composition option and Images of Women in Literature at the senior level in the English department. Contact Pamela Hearn, Department of English.

Southwest Missouri State University, Springfield (11,000 students) holds no prospect for a women's studies program. A new course by radio is being offered by Mary Alice Owens of the political science department, The Women's Issues: 1776-1976. Martha Wilkerson in sociology is working up a section on women for a proposed interdisciplinary course on oppressed minorities. Women in Literature has been offered in English, and Feminism was the title of a graduate seminar in history.

Cottey College, Nevada (330 students, 2 year) is "the only college founded by a woman, established for women, owned and supported by a woman's organization." (P.E.O., the sponsoring organization, is a women's secret benevolent society the full name and purpose of which is known only to members.) Women's studies permeates the curriculum, and pride in womanhood is a fundamental part of Cottey's philosophy. The dynamic president Evelyn Milam says at Cottey, "Women learn to respect, admire, work with and be supportive of other women." Mary Rhodes, who teaches history and plans to earn a Ph.D. in women's studies, fosters woman-pride in a positive and exciting way.

Drury College, Springfield (1150 students). Ruth Bemberger's Contemporary Woman offered through the political science department, is "intended to give students the opportunity to study the recently emerging roles of women (and consequently of men) with all their political, social, economic and psychological implications." Courses on Women in Literature and Women in History have also been offered by Lois Wimberley and Jim Smith respectively. Consciousness is high—in 1974 students initiated a course called Women's Studies: Here and Soon, taught by Steve Rutan and Edythe West.

Evangel College, Springfield (1100 students) has offered Women in Literature taught by Twila Edwards.

Missouri Public Schools: The general policy in Missouri, according to state Director of Curriculum Development Grace McReynolds (who says, "as an individual, I'm a 'liberated woman'"), is one of integration of all minority and cultural groups, rather than of focusing special attention on one group. She continues, "I'm not eager to splinter or fragment programs any further into 'women's studies' and 'men's studies'...." Classroom material is chosen to supplement this integrative approach and "books authored by women are extensively used and I don't feel that women are discriminated either for or against."

Springfield Public Schools (57 schools, 25,000 students, 1200 teachers): Director of Curriculum James Lowe also favors the integrated approach, but agrees much work must be done to integrate women into the curriculum. So far the emphasis has been on "important" women (e.g., Marie Curie), rather than on the importance of all women. Textbooks and library books are bought with an eye to illustrations showing active girls and domestic boys. (I give James Lowe an "A" for sincerity and good intentions, but my children's textbooks are still sexist.)

Girls have shown a steadily rising enrollment in industrial arts courses, but boys are still staying away from home economics—except for the all-male "bachelor living." Interest in girls' sports is beginning to swell, but lack of equipment and lack of trained coaches are holding the movement back. The small, struggling NOW chapter in Springfield is working in this area.

A four-day, all-day teachers' workshop was held last fall on cultural awareness—this included extended discussions of racism, ethnicism, classism and sexism. James Lowe feels that this workshop raised consciousness and that this type of approach is likely to change much thinking. He feels strongly that anti-sexism must start in early elementary school and that elementary teachers must unlearn stereotypes about "masculine" and "feminine" behavior.

An elementary classroom TV series is being presented throughout Southern Missouri this spring on various social issues, including sex roles. Children will be encouraged to discuss their feelings and beliefs about house husbands, male nurturance and daddies who cry. (Mothers who work in factories or fix cars are so common that they apparently aren't discussable issues any more.)

Continuing education for women (but not about women) is available throughout southern Missouri through college extension and high school programs. The Springfield YWCA offers standard exercising and craft courses and a special course called The Woman You Want to Be, which turned out to be a charm course. There are no non-institutional programs that I could find.

To sum up, while there is little general interest in women's studies in southern Missouri, a number of concerned feminists in schools and on campuses are sincere, dedicated and strong enough to begin to battle the forces of sexism and apathy.

The cartoon on the facing page is from The Development of Career Awareness in Young Children by Aimee Door Leifer and Gerald S. Lesser of the Center for Research in Children's Television at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education.