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By this time numerous articles have described the tensions, excitement, and apprehensions of the days preceding Houston—and even the curiously flat feeling of the evening before the opening session of this first federally mandated National Women's Conference. The press has reported with varying detail significant moments of the four-day weekend, such as passage of the resolutions on the Equal Rights Amendment, on Reproductive Freedom, and on Sexual Preference. There have been analyses of the impressively disciplined Pro-Plan Caucus, formed by heads of eleven delegations who were determined to facilitate passage of the twenty-six-plank proposed National Plan of Action within the allotted two and a half days by keeping debate going, forestalling possible delaying tactics on the part of right-wing delegates, and moving the agenda items to a vote.

But for women who had also attended the four-day founding convention of the National Women's Studies Association in San Francisco just ten months earlier, there was a familiar urgency of another sort: could there be a new integration of race and class and sex? Once more the endorsement of a program would affect the possibilities for widespread grass-roots coalition and the extent to which the priorities of race, class, and lesbianism would be recognized. Just as women went to San Francisco determined to strengthen ties between traditional feminist education and the larger women's movement, so at Houston an issue awaiting resolution was the actual breadth of the proposed National Plan, which was being defended as the minimal National Plan of Action for women of this country.

In Houston, as in San Francisco, the pressure of time was certainly a reality, given an ambitious platform of twenty-six major issues, alphabetically arranged, debate on each of which, if allotted equal time, could not exceed twenty-five minutes. Moreover, if the task of the NWSA San Francisco Convention was considerable—four days for 500 delegates to approve a program—the scope of the Houston Conference might have rendered it overwhelmingly impersonal—1,842 delegates, plus 4,000 official special observers and guests, 15,000 registered observers, 1,700 media people, and hundreds more who poured through the large exhibit hall. But finally, in Houston as in San Francisco, it would be the function of individual caucuses, preorganized or consolidated under the pressures of the occasion, to shape amendments that were far more specific about needs of particular groups. So, in San Francisco, Third World, Lesbian, Student, and Staff caucuses made impressive contributions and the NWSA convention ended with a renewed recognition of these major groups of women. At Houston, Disabled Women, Minority Women, Older Women, Rural Women, and Welfare Women would be sufficiently insistent, the needs of Pro-Plan notwithstanding, to refuse to table their objections until the allotted time for new business in the last session; instead they wrote out amendments in triplicate and, by standing in long lines at microphones, succeeded in introducing amendments that were eventually passed. In the same way, the resolutions on Education and on Rape were amended.

"Wonder Woman"
Not a Delegate

At the opening session in the Coliseum on Saturday morning, Congresswoman Barbara Jordan of Texas, the keynote speaker, urged women to accept the differences—economic, cultural, social, political, ideological—among themselves and to remember that "no one person and no subgroup at this conference has the right answers. 'Wonder Woman' is not a delegate." She insisted, "This conference is one more effort on the part of women for total recognition and total inclusion."

Commissioner Liz Carpenter of Texas likewise identified "the faces and voices ignored and silenced too often by the decision makers." Naming one woman after another, each representing a different kind of work, or a different class or race, she challenged her audience with a variant of: "Would you deny this woman and those like her their full rights as citizens of this great nation?" And again and again she answered, "Not me!" Carpenter and Jordan magnificently identified the diversity of American women; Jordan moreover asserted that "human rights apply equally to Soviet dissidents, Chilean
peasants, and American women.” But among this diversity, there was no mention of lesbian women. Punctuating the partial standing ovation that Carpenter received, there were shouts of “What about the lesbians?”

From the tenor of the opening session, then, it seemed clear that minority women were being acknowledged—rhetorically, if not through the strength of the resolution concerning them. But it seemed equally clear that, the Sexual Preference resolution notwithstanding, the rights of lesbian women would have to be fought for yet once more.

**Time to Support Women’s Studies**

On other fronts, the needs that were defined by NWSA in San Francisco were ably represented. Early on Saturday evening, Amy Swerdlow, former associate director of the Master of Arts Program in Women’s History at Sarah Lawrence College, member of the *Women’s Studies Newsletter* Advisory Committee and The Feminist Press Reprints Advisory Board, succeeded, despite strong antiamendment sentiment, in presenting a significant addition to the Education resolution. Earlier a delegate had called for the insertion of the words “and race” and “nonracist,” respectively, within the phrases “sex-stereotyping” and “nonsexist counseling.” Swerdlow’s proposal was equally critical: in a list outlining appropriate action through which state school systems can move against sex and race stereotyping, Swerdlow amplified the phrase “Review of books and curriculum” by adding: “The integration into the curriculum of programs that restore to women their history and their achievements and give them the knowledge and methods to reinterpret their life experiences.”

Swerdlow passionately urged her amendment: “Women’s studies has supported the women’s movement; now it’s time for the movement to support women’s studies!” Observers in the galleries, more alert than the delegates, erupted into shouts of “UP! UP!” indicating their insistence on a

**Coliseum Was Not the Only Forum**

Nor was the Coliseum the only forum for discussions of women’s studies at Houston. The Albert Thomas Convention Center, a five-minute walk from the Coliseum, housed hundreds of demonstration booths.

The feminist presses and journals represented—Academy Press, *Coyote Howl*, *Daughters, Inc.*, Diana Press, The Feminist Press, *KNOW*, Lollipop Power, *Motherroot*, *Ms., Northwest Matrix*, *Quest*, Radical Women Publications, Shameless Hussy Press, *Signs*, and others—reported brisk business and lingering discussions. A slide show of Judy Chicago’s latest project, “The Dinner Party,” ran continually, as did Lenore Weitzman’s slide show on elementary textbooks. Representatives from various women’s organizations ranging from Wages for Housework to WEAL to the National Women’s Studies Association handed out free literature. Government publications on women’s issues were also available. Many attending the conference felt that major activity centered around press tables, bookstore displays, and booths with informational materials. People would buy IWY T-shirts—but what they wanted most of all was information.

Reflecting sensitivity to this need, the second floor of the Convention Center, named “Seneca Falls South” to indicate the historical continuity of the women’s movement, was established, according to the program, to “reflect the energy and excitement which have been characteristic of the movement for more than 100 years.” One could literally have spent the entire weekend here, participating in women’s studies workshops, coordinated by Phyllis Palmer, of George Washington University, and the National Women’s Studies Association. Or attending films, slide shows, lectures, and displays at the Women’s Artspace. Or watching self-defense demonstrations, mime, poetry, concerts, and feminist comedy on the Seneca Falls Stage. Or hearing the readings and the discussions of the need for literary networks at the Women’s Salon. Seneca Soapbox offered each woman three minutes to have her say; loud applause and occasional jeers emanated from the soapbox area into surrounding workshops.

In addition, there were Panels on the *Arts; a Film Festival; and Briefings from the Top: Distinguished Women in Government Lecture Series. The Albert Thomas Convention Center also housed two floors of Skills Clinics and Success Stories, twenty-seven in all, many of them repeated
three times in the course of the weekend. Virtually every topic of pressing concern was offered, including How to Influence Schools; The Media: Making Them More Responsive and Responsible; Parliamentary Procedure for Beginners; Getting Women Appointed to State Boards and Commissions; Strategies for Academic Women on the Move; Shelter for Battered Women; The East Los Angeles Rape Hot Line; Displaced Homemakers; and Minority Women's Employment Program. The entire list suggests the sophistication of those who planned this program for observers, the respect with which observers were regarded, and the impressive battery of workshop and lecture topics, both practical and theoretical, that women have consolidated through the last ten years. And yet, looking at Houston from a women's studies'-eye view, there is a clear imperative for the future, for there should have been a more assertively defined women's studies presence: a women's studies booth, a caucus, a strong statement within the National Plan before the conference began.

Meanwhile, Back in the Coliseum...

Over in the Coliseum, by Saturday evening, as the voting schedule fell further and further behind and as the more controversial resolutions—ERA, Rape, Minority Women, Older Women, Reproductive Freedom, Sexual Preference, and Welfare—loomed closer but with less likelihood of adequate time for debate, the Plenary Sessions demanded one's full attention. Third World women actually pushed through a substitute resolution which is far more specific about the needs, and oppressions, of each group than the proposed Minority Women Resolution; the substitute resolution was movingly read, in turn, by a Native American woman, an Asian American woman, an Hispanic woman, and a Black woman. When it was passed, women joined hands and sang, amid some tears, "We Shall Overcome."

Possibly the most highly charged resolution was that on Sexual Preference. The ERA resolution—for many the high-

Balloons provided an outward and visible sign of preparation for the Sexual Preference resolution. Photograph by Carole Martin.
chair of the Sunday session, the agenda had been moving along briskly; the press was still there in force.

The resolution was read by Jean O'Leary, Co-Executive Director of the National Gay Task Force, IWY Commissioner from New York and the only Commissioner to identify herself as a lesbian. The debate that followed, frequently forced back to order by Saunier, was probably the most lively and substantive of the conference. The opposing arguments were predictable: an affirmative vote would be "self-indulgent at this time," destroy the chances for ERA, split the movement by attaching to it a label that many had been struggling to dissociate themselves and the movement from. To this charge there were many logical replies: Betty Powell spoke of lesbian invisibility, which "like the invisibility of all minorities negatively perceived by society has for so long fostered only ignorance of our persons, our values, our actual lifestyles, and also ignorance of the effect of legal, social, and economic discrimination upon our lives. We have all of us—Black, Brown, Red, Yellow, and White, old, young, imprisoned, and disabled—begun to see ourselves and each other more clearly. Clearest of all is the fact that the oppressions we suffer, as distinct and varied as they are, stem universally from the condition of simply being women in this world." Charlotte Bunch defined lesbianism as "more than sexual preference; it is a matter of civil rights, a life-style . . . the vote is for all women who are controlled by fear of being called a lesbian." And Betty Friedan, silencing the hall, turned the tide: "There is nothing in ERA to protect lesbians, and so we must allow them to be protected in their own civil rights."

Significant Energy for the Future

The rights of women in poverty were the final task of the day. With the passage of a strong amendment for welfare women—"Welfare First—We're Always Last," read their placards—the major work of the conference was over. Voting on a Women's Department and preliminary discussion of implementation remained for the last plenary session.

Significantly, then, the Houston conference confirmed the rights of a number of groups of women, and in so doing acknowledged their full membership in the movement. Far from splitting the conference or the movement, such actions may have healed it. The enormous joy that was perhaps the most keenly felt especially by lesbian women and minority women will provide significant energy for the future. For those watching national patterns, Houston left the women's movement far more alive than anyone, prior to Houston, had expected. □

Phyllis Palmer

A Note on Women's Studies at Houston

The National Women's Studies Association and the Women's Studies Program at George Washington University formally sponsored a series of discussions held in Seneca Falls South, the program and public assembly area of the National Women's Conference, under the title Finding Our History: Studies in American Women. The discussions, which were scheduled hourly during the day on Saturday and Sunday, were led by members of various women's studies programs and covered a range of academic issues, from "Lesbianism and Women's Studies" to "Welfare Women" and "The Economics of Discrimination." The sessions were centered around a library that included both monograph and journal literature on women's issues, as well as pamphlets and brochures from the National Association and various women's studies programs.

The sessions were organized at the request of Fran Henry at the IWY national office, after she talked with Virginia Allan and me at George Washington University and expressed her concern that most of the National Conference program focused on "how-to" get various things done and did not provide places to discuss substantive questions. After deciding that women with academic skills could lead sessions in which information would be provided, discussion stimulated, and argument focused, the only problem, in mid-October, was to figure out how to organize the 30 or so people necessary and to get them to Houston (at their own expense) in time for the November meeting. Quick calls to Florence Howe and Elaine Reuben yielded the names of active programs and sympathetic individuals in the Southwest who might be able to get themselves to Houston.

The next step was to begin calling people, most of whom were excited and enthusiastic and polled their programs and bargained with administrators for travel funds with remarkable speed. Especially helpful were Gale Baker at the University of New Mexico, which sent 15 faculty and students, Myra Dinnerstein at the University of Arizona, Mary Rothschild at Arizona State University, Annette Allen at Southern Methodist University, Jeanne Ford at the University of Texas/Arlington, Melissa Hield at the University of Texas/Austin, Shauna Adix at the University of Utah, Carol Pearson at the University of Maryland, Nan Bruckner at the University of Houston, and Margaret and Harold Feldman at Cornell University. By the afternoon of November 4, when all information had to be ready for the IWY Conference printer, Fran Henry was given a women's studies program that included 24 discussions of a varied range of issues addressed in women's studies courses.

Fran Henry's response to seeing a program molded into form in less than one month was that it proved how much life and energy and organization existed in numbers of women's studies programs around the country. Certainly, my experience in calling directors of programs at a variety of institutions was the same, along with gratitude for how quickly and easily and with so little fuss and quibbling people in programs organized themselves and responded. And, as most of us who were involved felt, both before and during the Houston meeting, much of our ability