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Reflections on the Convention

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Kidwell, Bea Medicine (Sioux), and I — were joined by an unusually large number of other Indian women from around the country, all prominent educators, political leaders, and advocates for Indian women's advancement. Bea Medicine and Woeha Cloud North (Winnebago) participated in other program sessions. Irene Mack (Menominee) actively worked with the Third World Women's Caucus and Ada Deer (Menominee) attended many sessions. Symposium participants were joined by Agnes Dill (Isleta Pueblo), Owanah Anderson (Choctaw), Shirley Hill Witt (Mohawk), and Billie Masters (Cherokee), who had come to discuss their Indian women's skills bank project; and by Twila Martin Kekabah (Turtle Mountain Chippewa) and Marlene LaClair (Otoe) of the Lawrence Indian community. Their presence, in numbers unusual in non-Indian and scholarly meetings, made for an intensity of discussion that was as rare as the large number of Indian women. Their presence, in fact, indicated the extent to which Indian women themselves are revising their histories and futures as well as their images in scholarship. Symposium discussion highlighted many areas which require further study: the need for reexamination of widely used, but inadequate and stereotyped, works on Indian women; the need for increased attention to Indian women's survival networks and to relationships between them and non-Indian women; and the need to focus on modern life rather than on the past. Interchange between the Indian and non-Indian

women attending the panel confirmed our feeling that Indians are, in general, a mystery to most people. Disappointing as that realization always is, we concluded that the panel offered a much-needed general education about Indian people to a receptive audience.

In short, the Convention and our participation in it had several positive effects. It galvanized our own network and outlined tasks that will contribute to a needed revision of the scholarship on Indian women. It underlined a clear need for our presence and involvement in contexts which require and are amenable to changed views of Indian women, as subjects of research and as scholars. While most of the women in our group felt a real distance between their goals of activist commitment and their work within a non-Indian scholarly Association representing the women's studies movement, they did feel an enormous potential in NWSA. While they felt that the women they talked with at Lawrence needed to be educated about Indian people, they also sensed a willingness to learn. We determined to explore that willingness next year with increased participation in the NWSA Convention in Bloomington.

Rayna Green is director of the Project on Native Americans, Office of Opportunities in Science, American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Reflections on the Convention

By Christine Grella

Looking back at the Convention, I find myself exhilarated — but also confronted with the issues and questions that were raised. Would our differences divide us irreparably, or would they be our source of strength? Could we attain our stated purpose of encompassing the needs of diverse groups: community educators, elementary and secondary school teachers, staff, students, community and four-year college instructors — each with different experiences of women's studies?

From discussions at dinner, to sharing our music and poetry, we exchanged ideas and impressions. Socialist-novelist Meridel Le Sueur spun her incredible life for us, embodying so many of the themes I felt at the Convention — the legacy of her own mother's struggle as a suffragist, the importance of form and language in shaping and changing our realities. In "Feminist Psychology," I saw women active in the field I intend to pursue in graduate school next year. I sensed a commitment to helping women grow and a challenge to this discipline, which is often used to control women. In "International Women's Studies," a South African woman spoke of progress for women in her country — but with no mention of *which* women. We denounced her, we denounced each other for not reacting quickly enough, we denounced AID's presence at the Convention, we denounced the Convention for not having more

Third World women. Our guilt of racism and our anger at each other surfaced and I feared that it would destroy us before we'd even begun — was this the nightmare below the surface of the dream?

Through "Feminist Theory" and "Voices of the Lesbian Community," I felt a spirit, a true commitment to sharing information, to fortifying knowledge, to forging connections among ourselves, and always, to an underlying awareness of the absolute importance of what we are doing. We are so aware of our revolutionary potential and necessity. At the Convention, we formed a feminist conclave; "back there," in "the outside world," or in "the academic world," in the male patriarchal culture, the connections we'd made would be our strength, and I sensed an urgency, a hunger to learn all we could to arm ourselves. I felt the battle scars of women who had knocked their heads against "it," and secretly, guiltily, I am thankful they have preceded me and made it somewhat easier for me to take my turn. How glad I am that my graduate education will not be as isolated and alienated as theirs was for many women here. . . .

Christine Grella has been secretary for the UCLA Women's Studies Program for three years.